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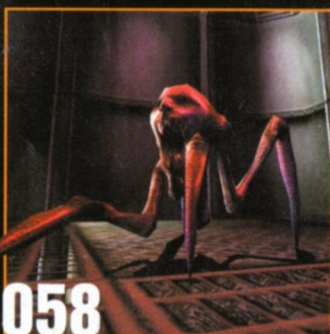
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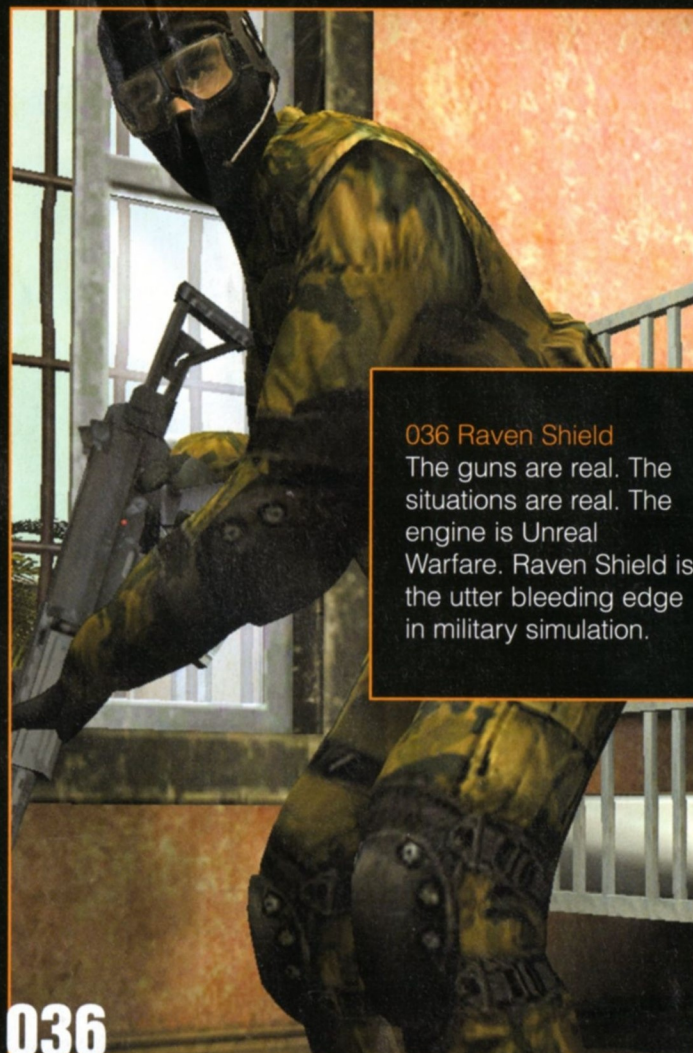
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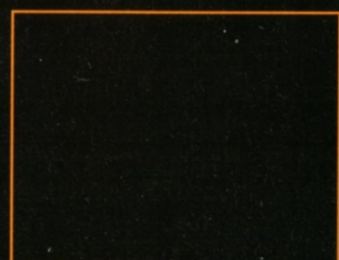
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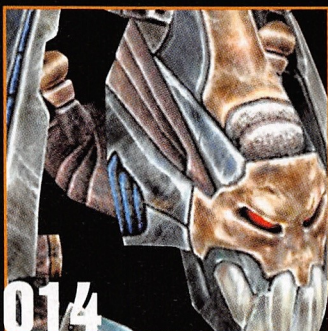


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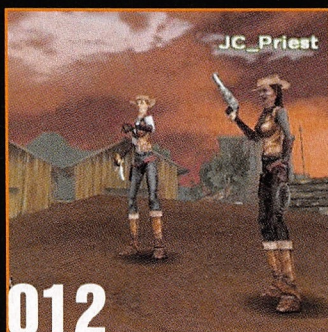


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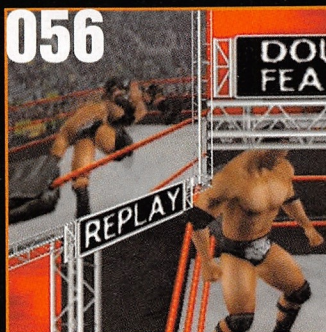


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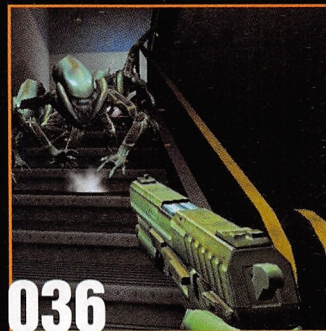
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Who are we, we gamers? What kind of people are we?

Are we good people, of fine character, or are we whining social retards, unable to relate with ourselves or others? Is a gamer someone you'd bring home to meet your mother? If your mother was a gamer, would you bring someone home to meet her?

I found myself pondering these questions this month after interacting with gamers on both the PCPP Forums and various online Quake 3 servers around the world. While the bulk of the people I played or chatted with were indeed fairly normal by any reasonable system of determination, time and time again I kept running into individuals who seemed to fit a distressing stereotype.

You know who I'm talking about - the guys who call you a lamer if they manage to gun you down and who call you a cheat when you manage to gun them down. Guys who, like Jere's experience of Battlefield 1942 on page 37, seem to take pleasure in disrupting the play experience, in cruel taunts and in mocking laughter.

Why does this unfortunate type exist and why are they allowed to play our games? Is it because multiplayer is for the most part about totally unstructured competition where your only task is to kill everyone again and again and again? Is it because when you play, you can call someone a motherless goat botherer and not get repeatedly punched in the head? Is it because these types DO get repeatedly punched in the head in the real world and need to take it out on us in the virtual world?

Think back to every game you've had ruined because a bad winner or a bad loser got on to your server and refused to play properly. Think of every LAN you've been

on when a petulant adolescent disconnects from a losing game by hitting the reset switch on his overly customised case, throwing the whole network into confusion.

The big question is what are we going to do about it? Us 'proper' gamers, the ones who get in there and play with all our heart, those of us who are happy to get caned again and again at CS or Quake 3 because the pleasure and the comradeship of the game are reason enough to play, how are we going to endure, suppress and eventually win through these unhappy few?

Online communities aren't pretend anymore. This isn't 1996 where IRC was, for most of us, a crazy new thing where you could pretend to be famous and hit on girls with impunity. Online communities are now real, populated by real people with real feelings. You wouldn't put a Photoshopped pornographic image of a friend's mother up on the wall in your home or at your workplace, so why do it online?

To all the antisocial, cruel, bad winners, cheaters, item dupers, farmers and the rest of you out there, remember this. We see you every day, we play with you every day, you may think you're safe and anonymous behind your computer screen at home, but you're not. Just because you don't use the name on your birth certificate doesn't mean we don't know who you are. When you say something or do something cruel, something that ruins the game, we remember. So watch out, or one day there may be no-one left on your server and even the bots will refuse to play.

Anthony Fordham

Editor

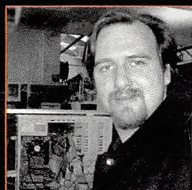
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Anthony "dude" Fordham

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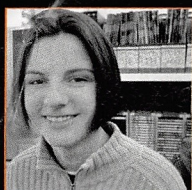
Now playing: Quake 3



Jere "Pokey Oats" Lawrence

Deputy Editor

Now playing: Neverwinter Nights



Shari "Not Boy" Davies

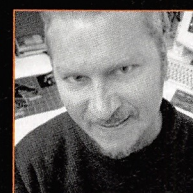
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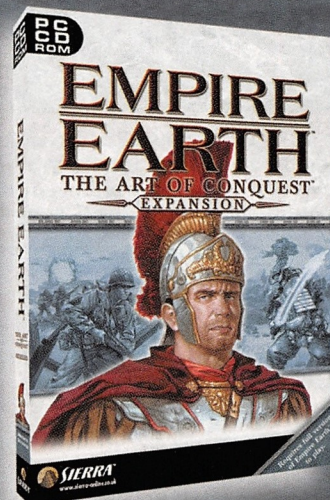
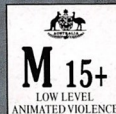


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LETTER OF THE MONTH – MMORPG GLUT

Dear PCPP, at this year's E3 there were a disturbing amount of MMORPGs. Some people may see this as a good thing but I am worried that soon there will be too much effort being put into these kinds of games and the wonder and glory that once belonged to the singleplayer storyline will be lost in a matter of years.

This is of particular concern to me because it could corrupt the talent pool - i.e. the developers from Blizzard may decide to seek better money at Verant. Personally I don't like pay-to-play games anyway, but please if you can reassure this grizzled 17-year-old gamer that there is still a place in the world for the great singleplayer story-lines like Diablo 1 and 2, The Elder Scrolls series, the GTA series (granted, the GTA series doesn't have much of a storyline, but it's fun to live out a fantasy of stealing cars and the like) and all the others.

Rory Byrne

We feel your pain, Rory. If you were privy to the press releases and schedules that we are, you would indeed be convinced that the MMORPG seems to be on the rise, kind of like the rat was on the rise just before the Black Death. But it's so weird; do these developers really think their MMORPG can survive in a market that already has two successful titles and a half-dozen dismal failures? The amount of time invested in an Everquest character and the amount of money shelled out in per-month fees to develop that character, means gamers will be reluctant to throw away their EQ investment to start all over again in a new game with new rules and new frustrating server problems. So why are so many people developing MMORPGs? Do they hope that they will be the next 'big thing' and wean people off EQ into their own world? Time will tell.



In order to take the sting out of his clearly grim and cheerless life, Rory Byrne scores himself a neat copy of Neverwinter Nights, where singleplayer lives forever!

RTS RANT

Why do big-name RTS games like Warcraft 3 and so forth always get so much credit? Sure it was a great game but apart from its awesome story and RPG component, what did Warcraft 3 really do for the genre? As for the Top 100 best games ever, why did

Earth 2150 get 77, Battle Realms get 44 and Warcraft 3, which didn't even scratch the surface on what those two games did for the genre, get 18? Does Blizzard pay you guys off? Other reviewers? It really makes me wonder. Earth 2150 and Battle Realms were far grander games with their unique take on the genre. Earth 2150 had its excellent depth with being the first to fully use a day/night cycle (attacks at night with lights off work lovely in multi in The Moon Project), and glorious Battle Realms had more characters than most RTS games. Warriors needed to be trained from peasants up to samurais, for example, all depending on the combination of training you followed. It also had Hero units in multiplayer as well, while the game really focused more on battle tactics and the actual units themselves instead of resource management like others. This whole unit training innovation to me made Battle Realms a much stronger game than Warcraft 3.

Listen to me now, RTS gamers. Those who own Red Alert 2 or Warcraft 3 or both, do yourselves a favour and go buy Battle Realms and Earth 2150 or The Moon Project. Then you will see the truth! ROM (PCPP #1 Fan) got Battle Realms after he got Warcraft 3 and he told me he's been playing Battle Realms like a mad dog while Warcraft 3 gathers dust. That's one example.

DarkDragonLord

Yeah okay, so Blizzard games may not be the most revolutionary titles you'll ever play but damn are they solid. Solid code, a reliable updating system and of course free online play over Battle.net. While the other games you've cited do indeed have their merits, the simple fact remains that I spent most of my third year of uni playing Starcraft and not any of the other more revolutionary titles on offer. A revolutionary title is like an April Shower - refreshing, unexpected, but you hardly want it every day. That said, one thing that didn't make it into our Warcraft 3 review was our surprise at how similar the game was to Battle Realms - they even use pretty much the same font! It's almost as if Blizzard looked at Liquid's debut title and thought, "Oh yeah, THAT's how we should do a roleplaying strategy game!"

UP MAINSTREAM WITHOUT A PADDLE

Despite the desperate efforts of Maxis and Electronic Arts with The Sims, gaming will never go mainstream like movies, radio, music and the like did many years ago. First of all, people above the age of about 25 are unwilling to try something new.

Secondly, other forms of media such as radio and television show gaming in such a negative light. People who may be willing to try a new product will be discouraged when it is called 'violent' or is promoted with childish advertising.

Thirdly, a major percentage of the human race believes in stereotypes and do care what other

humans think of them. Gamers are not called gamers by the wider community, they are called "nerds", "geeks", "loners" and "losers". People do not want to be known as such things.

Fourthly, young children find it fun to be interactively involved in what entertains them; stick a Hi-5 video on and they will be jumping around dancing and singing, but as we grow older people like to sit back and be entertained.

Look at movies and radio. You just sit back and watch or listen; you don't need to do anything. But games require constant attention.

A movie goes anywhere from one and a half hours to about three hours maximum today - not a lot of time when compared to even the shortest of games. Imagine you are watching a film, then, while running through an enemy base, the main character is killed. Suddenly, the movie cuts to where it was 10 minutes ago and the character starts his trek into the base once more. This happens about five times before the movie progresses past the death of the main character.

But this happens with games. You need to do the same thing over and over again, sometimes dozens of times in a row before you get past a difficult section. This is frustrating to all and to someone who is new, even more so.

Also, to play games, whether it be with a little black box under one's television or the big beige box of wires and plastic in the corner of the room, is very expensive. Compare it to movies. To watch a movie at the cinema you pay about 10 dollars and sit on a comfortable seat. A VCR from 10 years ago can play a VHS from back then or one you bought at Big W today, but a computer from 10 years ago has no hope of playing a new game such as Neverwinter Nights or Warcraft III: Reign of Chaos. Upgrades need to be made, money needs to be spent and time needed to be invested.

Chris Taylor

Some good points there, but don't forget our hobby is a multi-billion dollar industry now and we're starting to see some of the, shall we say, negative effects of that. Sequels are more prevalent than new concepts, the bold gameplay innovation of the Commodore 64 years is harder to find, marketeers who know nothing about games or gaming are in control of the titles we love, the lame-arse ads are everywhere and it will only get worse! Perhaps, in reality, we don't WANT games to be mainstream. This is our hobby. Why should we share it with the scum on the street?

56KS TO FREEDOM

Dear PCPP, first of all, compliments to your Top 100 issue, it was very well done. However, I would like to raise the issue that is the tolerance for 56Kers. Unfortunately I, like many other 56kers out there, am being pushed around and cast out like a bug in the gaming world (Better than being squashed I guess - Ed). It is very apparent that many more people are



getting DSL or cable, enjoying their delicious speeds and lag free environments.

But that does not give them permission to use that as an excuse to push 56kers around. What I mean is that more online game servers have CAPS on sentences like "56KERS = BOOT", "CABLE OR DSL PLAYERS ONLY" and "56K DL = BAN". And even when I do ignore the game names and enter, my download speed for a new map for example is eyed like a hawk by all the other speed demons. If my DL speed does not equal their high speed then I get the boot. This results in frustration of not getting the map I really wanted and also constant thrashing of my keyboard. I've seen it happen to a lot of people - they too saddened by the discrimination to 56kers. Will 56kers ever escape the clutches of DSL and cable hosts? I think not.

Shaun Chua

First of all, thanks for the compliment and glad you liked the list! But now to the meat of your dilemma. Yes indeed folks is cruel, heartless and even a little unfair. But consider this: for the last five years, gamers with low pings were sneered at, spat on and even occasionally gunned down in the street, their shattered skulls echoing with the cry "Die you Low Ping Bastard!" The lament of the LPB could be heard on every multiplayer server from Half-Life to Quake to the original Tribes. We're not victimising you Shaun, we're just finally getting our own back.

TUNNEL VISION

Hey all, just a quick gripe about many, many recent letters being sent PCPP's way regarding the inclusion of an Xbox section, albeit very briefly.

Who I am disappointed with is this vast majority of readers who wouldn't know quality gaming if it didn't come in a large cardboard monstrosity with a massive manual no-one will ever bother to read. I'll refer specifically to Mr Guerin (PCPP#77, "Dear PCPP"), as this is I believe the most unreasonable letter on this topic. Mr Guerin mentions the fact that PCPP's average score of Xbox games is around 86. To him, this screams conspiracy, but to me, it screams quality gaming finally being recognised by a long-time detractor of the console world. A more logical me screams that it's probably because PCPP would only review a select few Xbox games and these would either be high quality ones or high profile ones. Both these explanations seem a lot more rational than the fine and incorruptible staff at PCPP taking kickbacks from Microsoft. Mr Guerin also suggests that if he wants to read about the Xbox he would buy an Xbox magazine. Personally, considering the meagre 5% of the magazine being sacrificed, I would love to hear a bit about the console PCPP (and myself) enjoy so much that they would be willing to devote some of their precious magazine to. I query whether Mr Guerin has ever used PCPP as a review reference as to what game he should buy. If he trusts their judgement on this matter, why must their choice to include the Xbox be questioned as a Microsoft marketing ploy? Maybe all the PC-hugging console-haters need to stop being

so platformist and expand their horizons. The console world isn't as shallow and sport orientated as it used to be. There are many quality titles in development, many from former PC game makers (Tim Schafer's Psychonauts being the outstanding example), which deserve all gamers' attention. Time you crawled out of the desk and spent some quality time gaming in front of the far more comfortable TV. There's my two cents. Kudos to PCPP for having the balls to try something different and shame on Mr Guerin and others for threatening to cancel subscriptions, etc, due to their narrow mindedness.

Tim Lewis

Yeah, what he said. Seriously though, I think Tim has nicely wrapped up the whole Xbox discussion, so perhaps we should just get back to the real business at hand: bagging Daikatana. From the Forums this month, anyone?

SIDWINDER POISONING

I just can't take the fact that Microsoft make so much money off making crappy products. I can give them credit for the Intellimouse Explorer but the other things like the Strategic Commander and the Gamevoice are just poor. You fork out \$120 for something that is hard to configure and use. What's the point of buying a Strategic Commander when you can just use the keyboard? I know it's smaller and has less buttons but personally I think that's bad. I like to be able to configure all my keys across the keyboard and not have trouble touching the buttons because of the size of the bloody thing. Now the Gamevoice is a piece of junk. Its \$100 (in WA) for a headset. To top it off, not many people have them so in about 40 games you play over the Net, one person would probably have one too. Absolute junk. Well thanks for reading and let's hope Microsoft makes things that are useful like an electric beer opener or maybe a robot that does the cooking so I don't have to leave my precious computer.

Adam Rees

Well if Jere was here I'd let him answer this but he's not so I'll have to keep the faith: I've actually found MS game peripherals to be among the best in the business - they last longer, they have more functions and of course they're all but guaranteed to work with your operating system. The Strategic Commander, well I'll give you the benefit of the doubt on that one, but your assessment of the Gamevoice seems to indicate that you're only using one tiny bit of its functionality. The Gamevoice isn't about voice communication with other players, it's about voice COMMAND of your games! Star Trek: Bridge Commander works best with this - sit in the captain's chair and actually say "Engineering!" and you'll go right there! "Sheilds up!", "Set phasers to stun!" and "F* the Prime Directive!" can all be programmed into the Gamevoice. It's amazing fun, if you can get into it. So have a go!**

FROM THE FORUMS

This month, the usual suspects exhume that mouldy old skeleton, Daikatana. Join the discussion at forums.next.com.au/pcpowerplay/messageview.cfm?catid=75&threadid=17800

Date Posted: Aug/07/2002 11:42 PM

And the dogs name is Daikatana. Never thought I'd call a game a dog but this one surely is. After reading countless reviews on Daikatana, I thought to myself "Cheswick old chap, the game can't be as bad as they are saying, those doomsday quasi wannabe game critics are just spouting their usual negative crap!"

So, out I went and brought this game. Now, I don't consider myself to be some macho hero, but there is something lacking when you enemies in games are frogs, mosquitoes and very bad mechanical crocodiles. Would of been nice at least for Johnny Romero to program the humble shotgun into the game to rid the world of these annoying pests, but no, no shottie.

To play out Daikatana I have resorted to the ultimate sin 'God mode' this is the only way I can get through this game without losing my faith in PC gaming.

The reviews on this game were right for a change. Leave this one in the bargain bin. Shudder to the max!

Cheswick, Counter Terrorist

Date Posted: Aug/08/2002 1:48 AM

Yes but isn't bravery also considered as foolishness? Brave but foolish...

sinisterlookingsock, Skaarj


Date Posted: Aug/08/2002 3:21 AM

It doesn't sound like you've played much at all Cheswick. Yes the First Episode of the game is horrid. Very very bad. Sadly it's almost feels like the longest part of the game because it honestly is mind numbingly dull. There is no defending the 'Present Day' section of the game.

However, it does in fact get better. Each Episode of the game is entirely different to the last. This means the Mecha Frogs and Flies that "everyone" keeps bitching about don't make another appearance in the entire game.

As the locals and monsters become far more engaging so does the way you play the game. The token RPG element for both your character and the Daikatana adds some spice to gameplay. So too do your two NPC Sidekicks. Despite Ion Storm scorned for these elements you've have to give them some Kudos for trying something different, which has become a rare thing in gaming if you don't have a Gamecube. This is not to say that John Romero's Daikatana is a good game. It's average. So if you're a gamer who could have the patience to wade though the awful first episode (several punishing hours long) you'll be rewarded with a fairly enjoyable game after that.

Arach, Guardian



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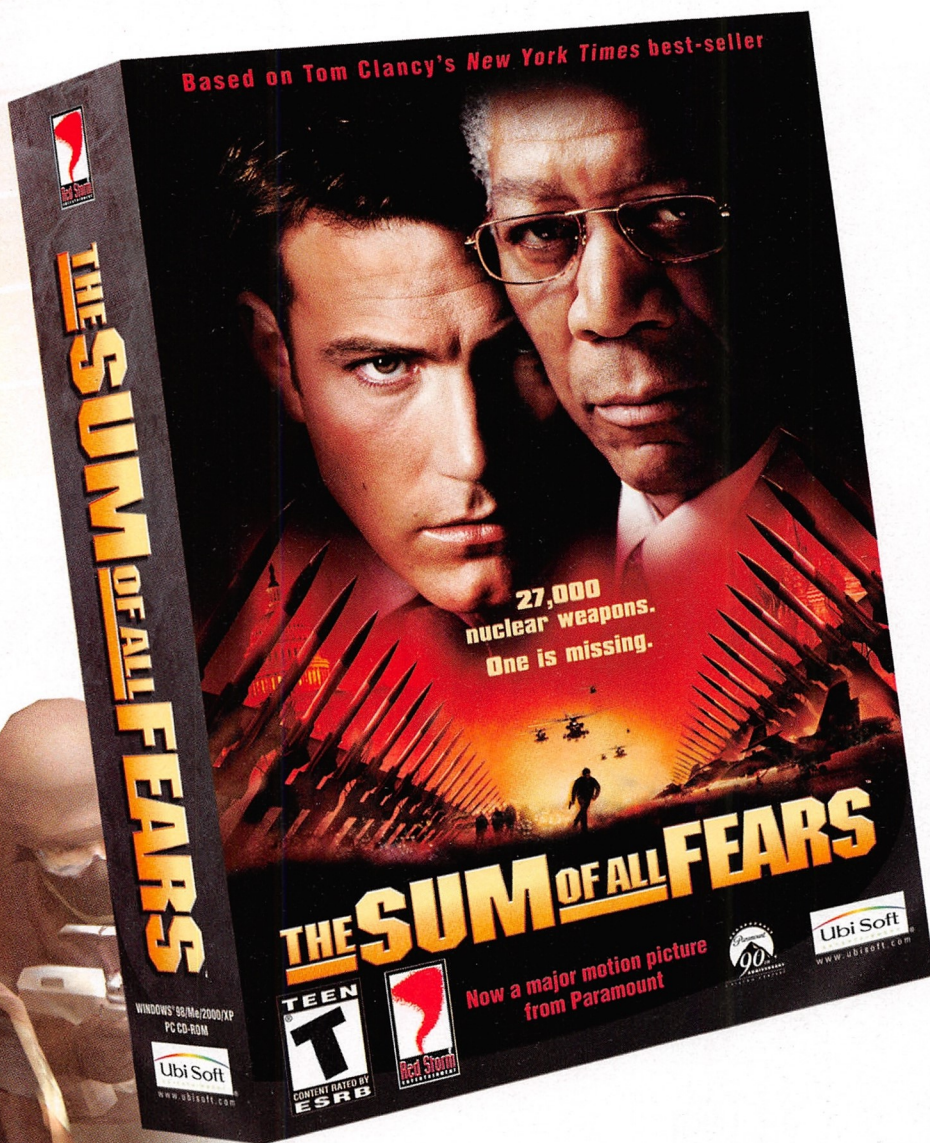
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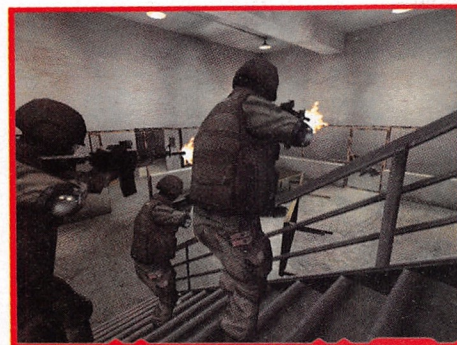


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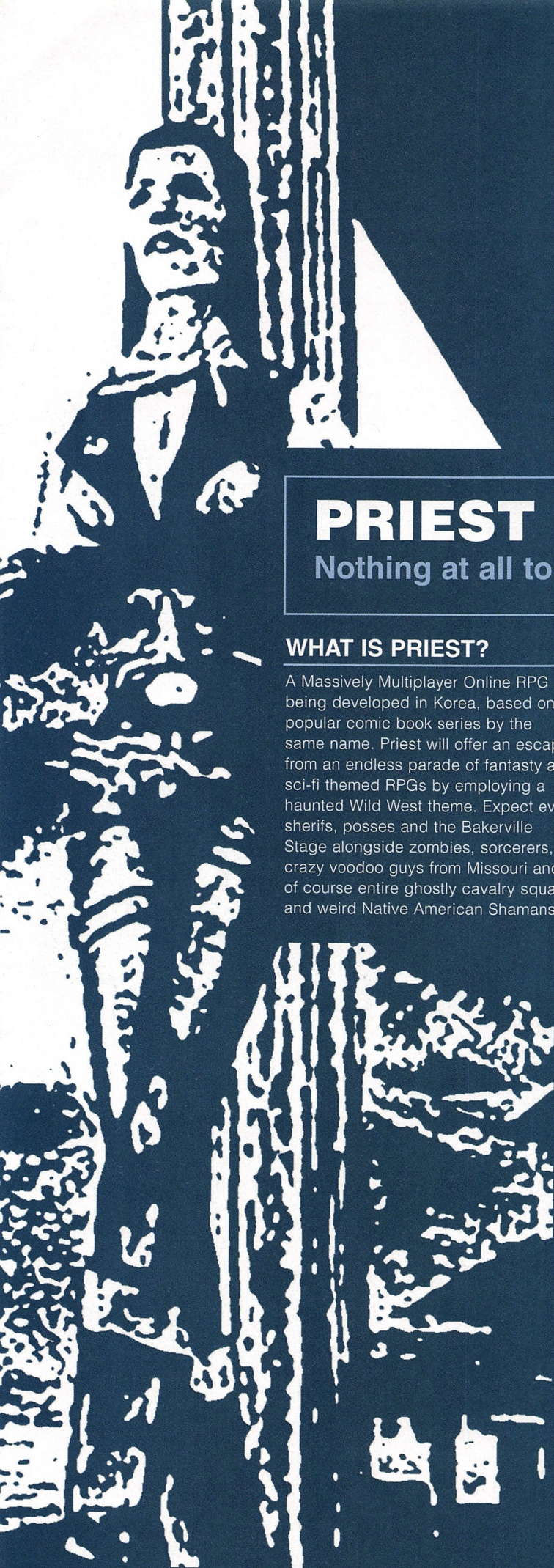
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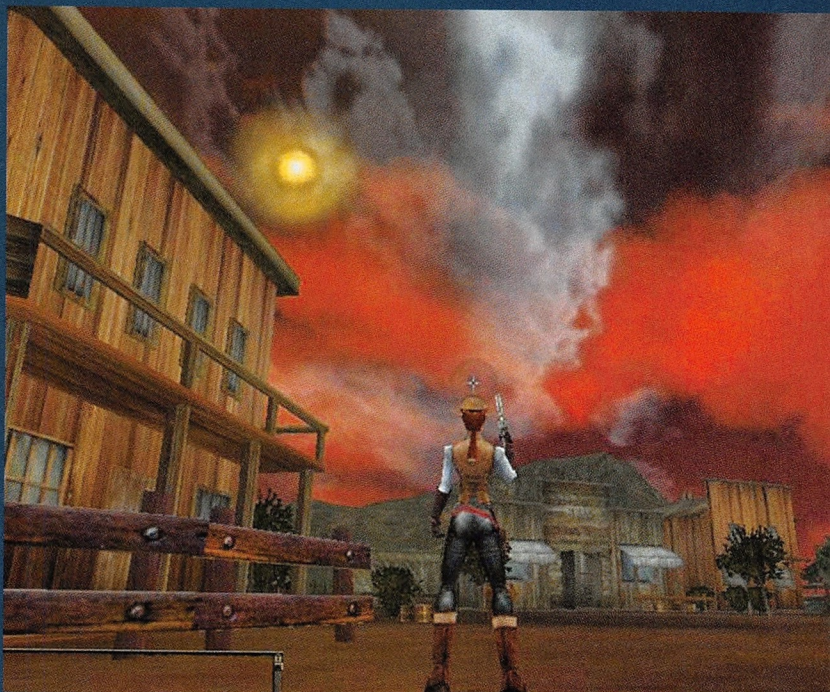
Nothing at all to do with Robert Carlyle

WHAT IS PRIEST?

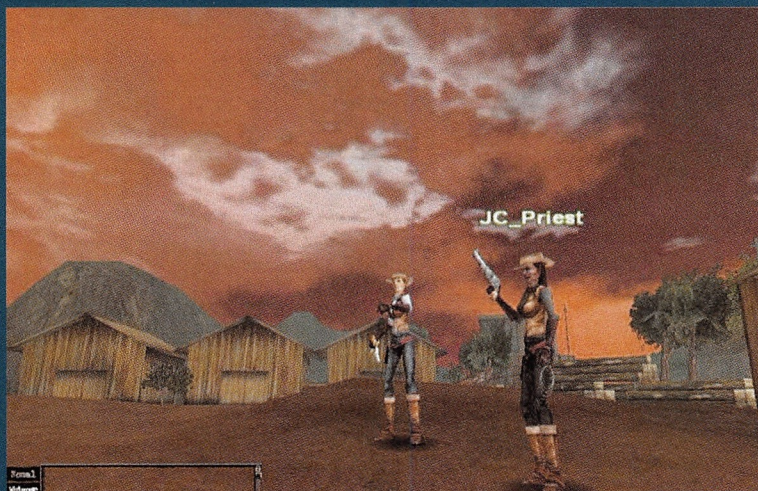
A Massively Multiplayer Online RPG being developed in Korea, based on a popular comic book series by the same name. Priest will offer an escape from an endless parade of fantasy and sci-fi themed RPGs by employing a haunted Wild West theme. Expect evil sheriffs, posses and the Bakerville Stage alongside zombies, sorcerers, crazy voodoo guys from Missouri and of course entire ghostly cavalry squads and weird Native American Shamans.



Almighty Temozerela, wouldst thou pass the mozzarella?



Now, where's the pub?



Priests with guns, you can't beat it.



It's a Clint Eastwood meets Night of The Living Dead kind of thing

■ Developer: JCEntertainment ■ Publisher: JCEntertainment ■ Distributor: Online ■ Due: Mid 2003

What do we know about Korea? There was some stuff with a war a few years back, and then the Olympics in 1988, but apart from that all we really know for sure about it is that they have really, really good Internet connectivity. Every home has a cheap, reliable, high-bandwidth connection that's taken for granted in the same way that we expect our homes to be hooked up to electricity, water and sewerage.

To this end, South Korea is the land of the MMORPG. Whereas the US and Australia struggle to ensure Everquest and Ultima Online remain going concerns, Koreans have access to dozens of MMORPGs, including the most heavily populated game in the world, Lineage. What this means is that while we over here may raise our eyebrows at every new MMORPG, companies such as JCEntertainment in Korea already have a couple of successful online games under their belts.

Sunday strip

JCEntertainment likes comics. The company's first successful MMORPG, Redmoon, was based on a fantasy comic that

enjoys considerable success in Korea. So it's no surprise to learn that Priest too is comic-based, closely following the work of Min-Woo Hyung who is quite something on the Korean comic-book scene.

While much of the play mechanic in Priest will feel familiar to players of other Korean MMORPGs, the setting is what JCE hopes will make its latest offering stand out from the pack.

Basically folks, it's the Wild West. But not the safe, dependable Wild West we know so well. This is a Wild West where zombies rub shoulders with cowpokes, twisters are possessed by the devil and horrible things lurk in graveyards.

Oddly enough for an online game, there is a main character, named Ivan Isaacs. Isaacs leads a faction known as the Pilgrims, in opposition to the Preachers, who as we might have guessed, worship a demon named Temozarella.

So the game will be all about balance, treading the thin line between good magic and evil magic. Some of the elements proposed by JCE sound intriguing. A unique 'pet' system will allow players to travel with an

animal or familiar which will assist them in battle and provide enhancements to particular skills. Resources will also play an important role, with the play area divided into resource zones that can be controlled by players or player factions. Gunfight at the old mine! Then back into town for a sarsaparilla, then back out to the old mine for another gunfight, this time against zombies!

Hail Mary full of bullets

It's a question of themes, says JCE US Office General Manager Jason Kim in an online interview. Priest intends to explore the ideas of cowboys, gunplay, Catholicism, horror, demon spawn from beyond the pit and of course donkeys. This whole melange of ideas will be cutely labelled "Hard-Gore", no doubt making Priest the world's first HGMMORPG.

Korea remains as a shining land of promise on the metaphorical gaming horizon, reminding us that one day we too could enjoy a Hard-Gore Wild West RPG. Expect to be hearing about how great Priest is but how you won't be able to play it until early 2003

Anthony Fordham

Why Priest Deserves a Second Look:

It's a Hard-Gore religious experience

Quirky take on the Wild West... with Seoul

Strategy-based control of resource zones

Massively multi-player with pets



Prairie... aawwww how cute.



Zombie... aawwww how cute.



The Sydney Hyatt, 2052



Nice

FIRESTARTER

Yeah I'm the one infected, twisted animator

WHAT IS FIRESTARTER?

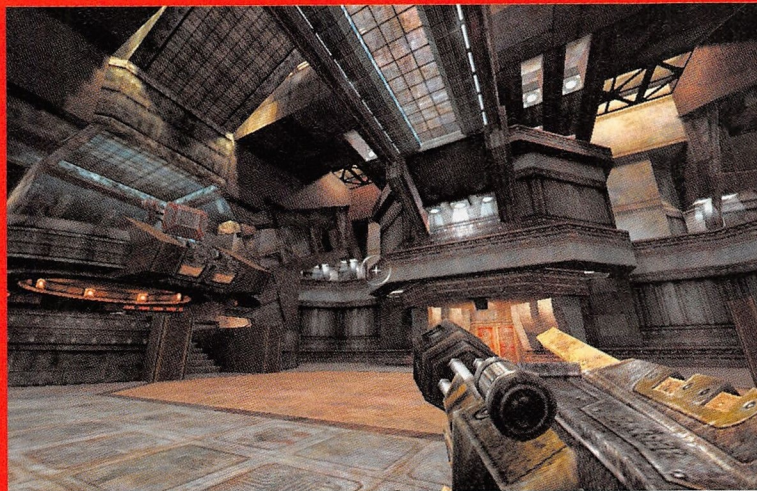
Another in a seemingly endless parade of FPS games, but one that distinguishes itself through gameplay design.

Firestarter promises to offer a model that's half Serious Sam and half Quake 3 Arena, with hundreds of monsters spawning into a crowded, enclosed level. Character classes, weapon upgrades and special skills should all add flavour to the mix.

WEEEEEEEE!



No guns in the piano bar! You're kidding me, right?



That's it! My toilet didn't have a hygiene seal on it. Die!

■ Developer: GSC Game World ■ Publisher: TBA ■ Distributor: TBA ■ Due: Christmas 2002

G SC Game World is one of those mysterious developers that seems to imply that it's based in the Ukraine but doesn't really end up saying one way or the other. The web site is in English though, which is nice, but it's that peculiar kind of Slavic English that you can only really understand once you get to the end of each paragraph and all the pieces suddenly fall into place.

A little background

But first, the obligatory back story. A mere eight years into the future, and an "up-to-date virus-infected virtual reality-playing machine" has entrapped the player's consciousness much like the Vadrigar entrapped Sarge in Quake 3. At the whim of this beastly machine, the player must face wave after wave of hideous monsters, each more brutally perverted than the last. The clever bit is that the player has only 48 hours before something vaguely threatening happens - presumably this high-tech arcade machine will take over the entire Timezone and deprive funkily dressed secondary school

students of those stupid dancing games.

Gameplay will effortlessly blend Serious Sam and Quake 3. Mission briefings are always the same: simply survive in the level for an allotted amount of time. On spawning, the player will have a handful of seconds to learn the map, whereupon dozens of enemies will spawn in turn and get stuck right in. Interestingly, while smaller weaker enemies spawn instantly, larger more difficult enemies take some time, and the player can watch with increasing nervousness the silhouette of the enemy taking shape even as they try frantically to clear the map so they can deal with this new challenge.

Smart beasties

GSC also promises an intriguing level of monster AI. The tiny chittering things will, as always, run straight for you with their gnashers gnashing, but larger mosnters will display increasingly advanced behaviour, including using smaller monster as familiars,



or even spawning new monsters themselves - something which hasn't been seen since Doom 2's Pain Elemental.

Naturally Firestarter will also include a multiplayer mode, which looks to follow the tried-n-tested Quake 3 model of complete anarchy. However, a couple of new modes also look intriguing, including a pseudo-cooperative "kill the most monsters to be the winner of the level" mode and Monster Match, where one player takes the role of the monsters, has unlimited respawns and tries to kill the other player within a set time limit.

The bespoke engine looks very much like Quake 3, which in our book is a good thing, and four distinctly different game worlds are promised, although GSC hasn't yet said what the four worlds will actually be.

The company which may or may not be from the Ukraine promises to have Firestarter warming your hearth late this year or perhaps early in the next.

Anthony Fordham

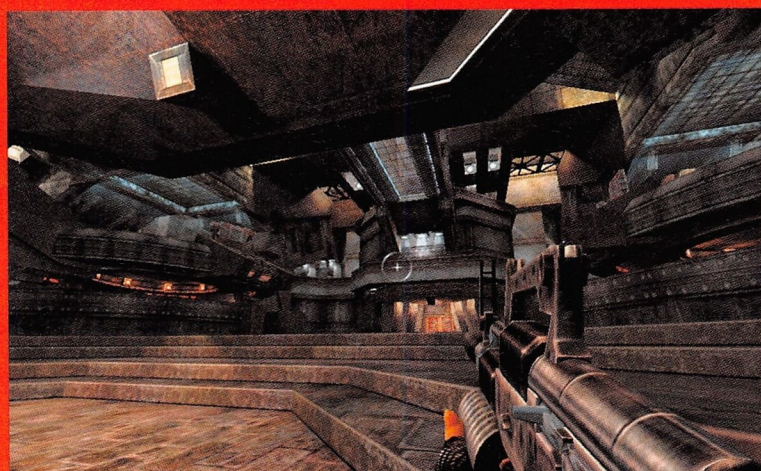
Why Firestarter Deserves a Second Look:

Blend of Serious Sam and Quake 3

Monsters have varying levels of intelligence

New multiplayer modes: BE the monsters!

Fresh singleplayer mode



Shall we frag now or frag later?



No can of baked beans will ever give you trouble ever again.



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Spotlight



NEWS FROM ALL QUARTERS OF THE GLOBE

Allies Go Hollywood

EA opens a new WWII theatre near you



EA has officially announced the expansion to Medal of Honor Allied Assault and things are going more Hollywood.

From the landing on Omaha Beach to storming the bunker in Berlin, playing the original Allied Assault was like stepping into Spielberg's Saving Private Ryan.

To capture that true Hollywood-doing-gritty-WWII feel, developer 2015 called on the technical expertise of Hollywood veteran Captain Dale Dye.

Dye not only consulted on Saving Private Ryan but also on such films as Platoon, Born on the Fourth of July and Forrest Gump.

Now EA is going a step further and bringing some more big guns onboard, hiring additional Hollywood experience to take the production values a notch higher.

Mark Lasoff has joined the EALA studio as the Art Director. Lasoff won an Academy Award for his visual

effects work on Titanic. For those who can't take Lasoff seriously with just the king-of-the-world credit, he also worked on the Scorpion King as well as the upcoming Matrix sequels.

To further capture a realistic experience of falling shadows and slanting rays of light, Tom Allen has been brought in as a Lighting Supervisor. He has 15 years of industry experience and his lighting can be seen in feature films including Superman and Shrek.

Silver screams?

Of course there will be more to the expansion than just movie magic.

Players will be thrust into the muddy boots of Sergeant Jack Barnes with nine new singleplayer levels and 12 new multiplayer maps.

Medal of Honor: Allied Assault was one of the surprise smash hits of late 2001 and has been the standout FPS of the past few months. We gave MoH: Allied Assault a healthy 90% in PCPP#70, it's still in the PC top 10 and the PS2 version of the game is dominating all games sales charts.

The game dropped you right into the action in a D-Day mass beach landing; this expansion will take you back to the beach, but hours earlier with the British 6th Airborne on a pre-dawn drop behind enemy lines, on a mission to take out the artillery and pave the way for the D-Day landing.

From there the expansion will take players right through the final



It's your mum, she says you have to come home RIGHT NOW



Last stop, the beaches of Normandy. All out, all change.

months of the war from Belgium for the Battle of the Bulge, on into Germany for the fall of Berlin and the end of the thousand-year Reich (which lasted 12 years thanks to efforts of Medal of Honor-types).

The multiplayer mode will allow a lot more choice; now you can play British, American, German or Russian troops with the choice of weapons expanded to reflect this.

A new tug-of-war set of maps has also been added.

These feature teams fighting over five objectives with the first to hold them all taking the round. What makes this more interesting (and possible) is that these maps have been designed to be chock-full of choke points where careless teams can easily be pinned down.



Antitrust Microsoft

Software giant feels the effects of a roused Justice Department

Microsoft has agreed to reveal 385 pieces of Windows code as the first steps in fulfilling the deal it reached with the Justice Department in the wake of the antitrust case brought against it.

Two hundred and seventy two components will be made generally available to developers with the further 113 proprietary protocols available to be licensed by computer server makers.

Microsoft claims this will help developers produce hardware and software that works more efficiently with Windows.

The Justice Department is looking over the terms of this licensing to see if it is compliant with the settlement details.

Microsoft has also been forced to standardise licensing terms for Windows so that it does not exert undue control on certain manufacturers.

Beyond this, Windows XP has been made so that access to certain features such as Outlook, Internet Explorer and the Media Player can be removed and replaced with the client's or manufacturer's choice of programs.

This would hopefully stop Microsoft putting the squeeze on manufacturers, forcing them to use all Microsoft products if they want to use the industry-standard

operating system.

These changes were central to the Justice Department's objectives of allowing greater software freedom with the Windows OS. Out of the 18 states which brought the case, nine are still yet to sign the agreement. These nine are appealing the agreement, wishing for Microsoft to reveal more code and to sell a stripped-down version of Windows which could be customised by other software manufacturers.

Microsoft refuses to reveal one program interface and server protocol because it fears clones of its operating system and says that if it

starts getting this competition it loses the incentive to invest in further Windows research and development.

Meanwhile, a leaked e-mail allegedly from Dell details that it's not allowed to sell blank PCs without a Windows OS anymore, citing its contract with Microsoft as the reason.



I'm an aeroplane!

Busting Punks Online

Who watches the cheaters?

Both the latest point release of Quake III and patches of Soldier of Fortune II: Double Helix will incorporate Even Balance's Punk Buster anti-cheat software.

Punk Buster made a name for itself as an unofficial program developed for monitoring and removing cheats from Half-Life and its mods (most famously, Counter-Strike). Punk Buster never moved beyond a beta for Counter-Strike because the team decided they had gone as far as they could without integrating their software into the program.

Now both the Quake III and Soldier of Fortune developers are working closely with Even Balance to integrate Punk Buster into its games to level the playing field. Quake III isn't the first id property to turn to the Buster - the developers of Return to Castle Wolfenstein already called Even Balance onboard.

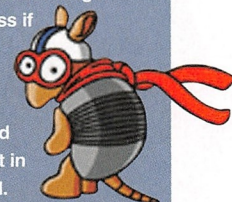
One of the strengths of Punk Buster is that after it is integrated into the game Even Balance can update it with new counter-measures as new cheats pop up. Say no to cheating punks!



BYTESIZE

NAMING RIGHTS

Ultima Online players are being given the option to rename their characters. No longer will a dream run started in a drunken stupor bind your mighty champion to the name character1, Fannyface or IreallyDunno. For a mere US\$29.95 all can be set right with the Character Name Change Service. We guess if you have to pay to change your name in the real world you should have to pay for it in Britannia as well.



HUMILITY PAYS

The Philippine Star newspaper reported that a 17-year-old Filipino girl was shot dead after whooping a schoolmate at a computer game. After beating this guy at a computer shop, she teased him, calling him a "sub par" player. Since he was carrying a homemade gun, it's probably safe to say that this guy wasn't playing with a full deck to start with and poor Galang declaring "i ownz j00" was too much to bear.

STRAIGHT FACE

Eyematic are releasing Face Station 2 for facial animation. What's cool about this program is that it allows an animator to motion capture facial expressions in real-time using a standard PC (with a bit of beef) and a camcorder. No funny reflective dots, offline rendering or other external motion capture gear is required.

BYTESIZE



Uh-oh, down I go...

Tribes Fast Attack Gone Awry

Singleplayer expansion cancelled

Sierra has announced the cancellation of Tribes Fast Attack. The expansion was to feature new missions, tighter maps and altered graphics to make the game feel faster. Apparently the people in the know sat down and played the new singleplayer elements and decided they weren't different enough to the core Tribes 2 gameplay to charge money for (or to complete). Sierra has instead decided to re-release Tribes 2 at a bargain price.

The good news is that the other elements developed for Fast Attack

such as the competition MOD, Team Rabbit 2, and the new maps are all in the beta stage and will all be released free of charge as updates when they are done.

Sierra's Alex "Marweas" Rodberg said the decision had been made months ago but they waited to announce it at the Tribes Council where they could try winning over their toughest fans (which he claims they did).

If you are curious about the expanded singleplayer levels, the only place you'll be able to check out what you're missing is in Tribes Aerial Assault for the PS2.

MMORPG DOCO

Independent filmmaker Daniel Liatowitsch has made a documentary called *Avatars Offline*, looking at the social effects of massively multiplayer online gaming. He talks to the guys behind some of the biggest online games including Richard Garriott, Raph Koster and Marc Jacobs as well as critics, academics, psychologists and analysts. The programme focuses on why people play the games, the characters they assume, the social bonds they make, love lost and found, gender bending and so on. It was previewed by the geeks at a Games Developer Conference earlier this year and they seemed to approve. If you're interested, you can check out or order the DVD at <http://www.avataroffline.com/>.



FREELANCER

Digital Anvil's long awaited game is still coming and is, surprisingly, still looking sweet. At this year's Gen Con it was back on display showing off its Wing Commander cum Privateer gameplay. The game is set to be massive (46 star systems) and freeform allowing players to be a warlike hotshot or an economic trading power, exploring the galaxy and upgrading equipment.

Poof... They're Gone

More games in doubt

Tribes Fast Attack isn't the only anticipated title which has been put under a dark cloud. Outcast 2, the Sam & Max sequel, C&C Renegade II and the Two Towers games have all come into question.

German Outcast fan site Adelpha.de has reported that Appeal has closed its doors as a part of bankruptcy proceedings. This doesn't bode well for Outcast II as they developed the original and were working on the sequel. Outcast was notorious for its use of voxels but boasted an impressive AI which allowed NPCs to interact and keep tabs on each other which made for some intense detective work and an impressively immersive world.

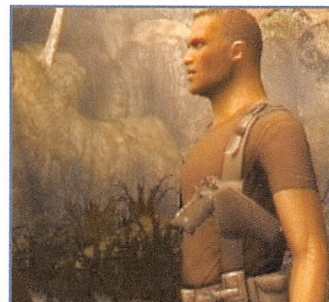
Infinite Machine has also filed for bankruptcy after its New Legends Xbox title didn't do as well as expected. Ex-Lucas man Justin Chin had been entrusted with the sequel to the hilarious Sam & Max Hit the Road but without his games studio (Infinite Machine) it doesn't look like getting very far.

C&C Renegade II has been canned before being officially announced. Work had begun on the project focusing on the multiplayer aspects, as was mentioned on the Renegade Official Forum, but now Westwood is disavowing any knowledge of the project.

Finally, the game version of Tolkien's Two Towers may never

come to the PC. Apparently its development was lagging too far behind and it wouldn't have been ready to cash in on the movie launch. Reports indicate the console versions are coming along well so maybe the Two Towers was just more console-appropriate and didn't make a great PC game.

Oh yeah, with French developer Cryo closing its doors, Dune Generations is also toast.



"I'm calling my agent."



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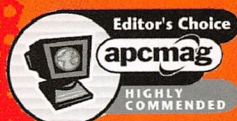
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BYTESIZE

RC RAT

Mad scientist types have developed a way to remote control rats. By placing electrodes in a rat's brain to tell the whiskers they were touching something they could manipulate rats into moving left or right. A buzz in the pleasure centres made it feel good to move forward, allowing forward motion to be controlled (Now that's what I call motivation! - Ed). This system was good up to 500m and only needed a laptop to control. Add a mini-camcorder and imagine the applications. Get your mind out of the gutter ... we're talking search and rescue.

ROCKET CARMACK

John Carmack of id fame has been talking up his company Armadillo Aerospace. The goal of this small research and development team is to win the X-Prize. This prize is US\$10 million and goes to the first team that can take tourists into space for an orbit of the Earth and repeat the process again a week later. Talk about diversifying your tech stock.

MICRO MMOG

The massively multiplayer game Time of Defiance has already hit PCs but now it's about to go massive on a small scale: Pocket PCs. Players with Pocket PC compliant devices (like certain phones) will be able to battle with up to 1000 other players for control of magical islands in the coming months in the US. Now you'll be able to avoid working no matter how far from work you actually are.

Open Up

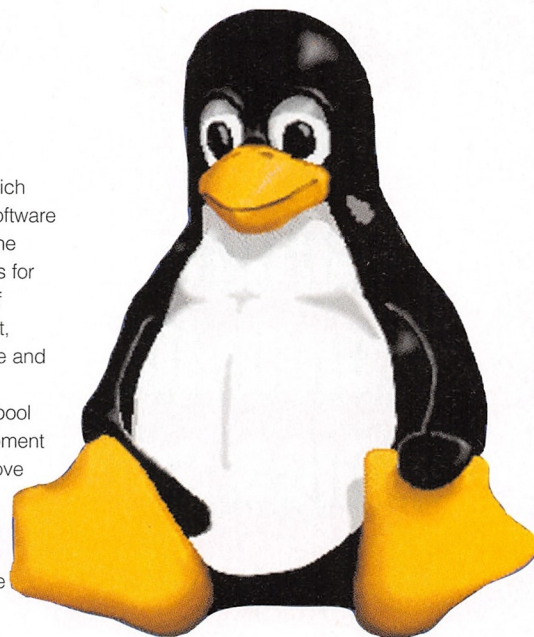
EU advised to go open-source

A report by Unisys Belgium commissioned by the IDA (Interchange of Data between Administrations) called the Pooling Open Source Software Study, has recommended, unsurprisingly, that the European Union governments should pool software resources so that they can be re-used.

The move to open-source has been recommended so that each government would have sufficient access to the code to tailor any programs specifically to their needs as well as allowing a clearing house for software to be created.

Under the scheme into which governments would donate software for re-use, the main focus of the initiative would be applications for public sector administration of roads, education, tax payment, hospitals, public health, justice and territory management.

Re-using the code would pool resources, cut overall development and maintenance costs, improve quality and efficiency and encourage co-operation between EU members, not to mention producing compatible computer systems.



Blizzard and Sierra Left Cold?

Vivendi considers selling game interests

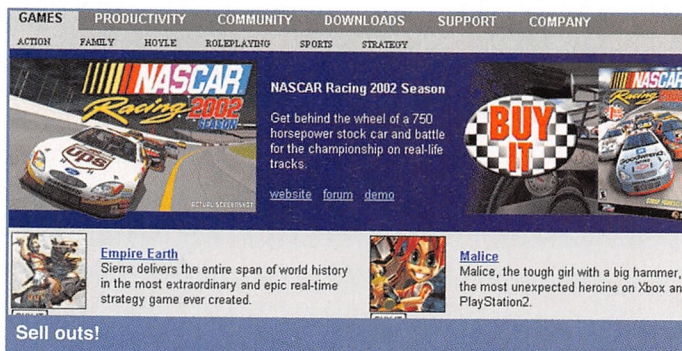
French company Vivendi has run into all manner of strife with well-cooked books and 12 billion euro debts.

The company's Chairman, Jean-Marie Messier, told the Wall Street Journal Europe that the games holdings of Vivendi were not core business elements and were expendable. Vivendi's games interests include Sierra, Blizzard and Universal Interactive and between them they rake in revenues of around half a billion euros (AU\$910 million) a year.

With the strong figures and rumours that Microsoft is looking for

developers to strengthen its Xbox line-up and talk of Sega in the market, Vivendi's stock price rose

eight per cent in the wake of a possible games sell-off which could net them around AU\$3.6 billion.



UFO: Aftermath

Altar Interactive revives an old fave

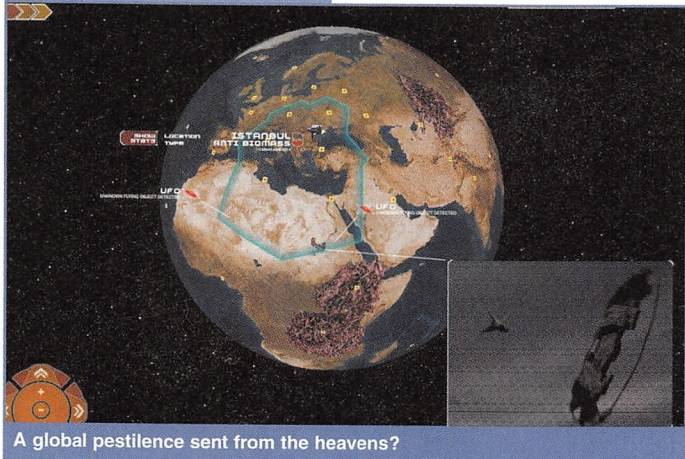
The X-Com franchise is back!

Players will once more have to lead mankind from the ashes in this latest UFO game. Aftermath sees the Earth bombarded with a nasty virus by an alien menace. Soon the bug is inert but most of the world has been wiped out - which means time for X-Com action!

A small group of well-funded, elite troops is assembled to find out what happened and to stop the aliens in their slimy tracks.

Aftermath focuses on strategic squad-based combat and blasting

UFOs out of the skies. Since you have the entire resources of the surviving world to back you up, gone are the days of selling hand lasers to turn a meagre profit. Other changes include a smaller squad (one active group of seven specialists with special powers drawn from a pool of agents) and global research points. Returning will be random map generation, massive exploration, and a choice of multiple missions so you can set your own objectives. Aftermath is looking at an early 2003 release.



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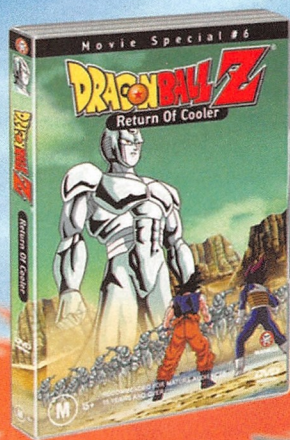


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BYTESIZE

COOL YOUR JETS

Scientists believe that air traffic has a significant effect on weather. The condensation that forms in the jet trails of passenger liners acts like insulating high-level cloud cover which could moderate temperature by a little over a degree, making the minimums warmer and the maximums cooler. Meteorological researchers only noticed this after the three-day cessation of regular flights in the US after 9-11.

PREGNANT FURY

A 47-year-old robber in the Philippines got the beat down of his life when he tried to rob a 25-year-old pregnant woman. Clarissa de Guzman, was not only six months pregnant but was also a black belt in tae kwon do. She disarmed her attacker of his knife and then knocked him to the ground. He tried to flee but was disabled with quick kicks to the body, head and groin (Again, what does this have to do with gaming? - Ed).

EA MUSIC

Gaming big-boy EA is using its clout to associate big name games with big name recording artists in a major cross-marketing combo move. E-Trax is a partnership program designed to use cross marketing, co-operative advertising and media events to benefit games and new music tracks. The first game to benefit from the program will be Madden NFL 2003 which will feature artists including Bon Jovi, Andrew WK, Nappy Roots and Good Charlotte. EA already has Atlantic, Capitol, Dreamworks, Electra, Interscope, Island/Def Jam, MCA, and Lava onboard. If gridiron isn't your thing, most of EA's big sports titles (basketball, soccer, hockey and NASCAR) are also lined up for the E-Trax treatment.



Devastation

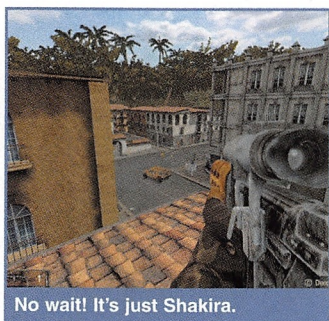
Sticking FPS devastation to the man

Devastation is a stunning-looking game making the most of a highly modified Unreal Warfare engine. Besides the awesome character models and lush backgrounds Devastation boasts a highly interactive landscape where debris scatters realistically from explosions, you can push trash around to make barricades and smash bottles to use as weapons.

It features a cyber-thriller storyline that's drawing comparisons to Deus Ex, Half-Life

and Rainbow Six, has 32 levels, an arcade and sim multiplayer setting as well as a techno track by Messy, a new incarnation of Love and Rockets (Who? - Ed).

The game is set in the future where mercs, street toughs and dissidents fight against an evil police state which has been doing twisted things behind the scenes. Keep an eye on Devastation as relative newcomer Arush Games is setting to take on the big boys with this one. Coming December.



No wait! It's just Shakira.



Wanna buy some scag, chico?

Gladiators: Galactic Circus

Fighting to save the princess 60s sci-fi style

Kirk versus Spock. A long pointy pole-thing. Arena fighting camp-alien-60s style. Tacky music. We've waited for this game too long.

Well, it should be arriving around the end of the year courtesy of Eugen Systems. When his ship is sucked through a black hole and crashes on an alien world, beefy space marine type Callahan is the only survivor. He is soon captured and only has one chance to live: survive the weird, camp, 60s sci-fi arena there.

A princess takes a shine to our hero and chooses him as her

champion knowing that if he wins she'll have all the popular support she needs to take the throne.

From here dead members of Callahan's US military team are cloned to help him battle B-grade sci-fi cyborgs and fantasy opponents. He'll fight, grab power-ups, re-create tanks and bazookas to give to his reconstituted crew and do it all in front of millions of fans. The action/strategy/arcade action can have up to 500 units on the screen at once and you can zoom right out to an RTS-like view so you don't miss any of the spectacle.



Oh, the humanity!



Forget it, Marge. It's Chinatown.

You're My Xenus

FPS RPG Colombian brew

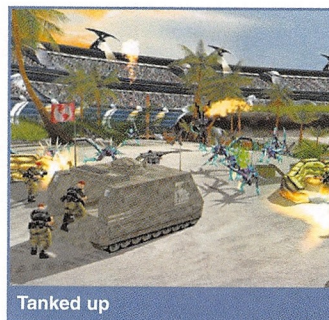
Deep Shadows is putting together a serious little action/adventure with Xenus. It begins when Kevin Myers gets a call saying his sister hasn't been heard from in 10 days. She's a journalist in Columbia so she's bound to be in deep poo.

Naturally, Myers sets off to Columbia to find her. There he finds the island is caught in a war between six factions: officials, guerrillas, drug lords, Indians, bandits, and the CIA.

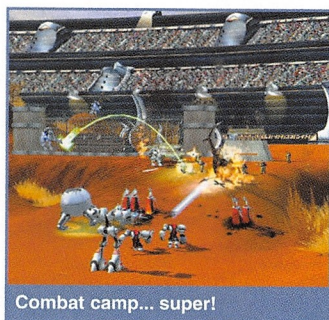
Helping one faction generally makes one or more of the others

extremely unhappy making for a dangerous tightrope. For Myers to find his sister will take plenty of investigation and action; there's 650 square kilometres to explore and that translates to between 50 and 150 hours of play.

Deep Shadows promises multiple paths through the game depending on whom you turn to and the level of force you employ. Myers also has to earn money during his investigations because, in the Columbia of Xenus, nothing happens without green lubricating the wheels.



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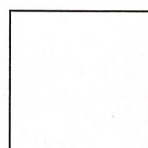
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All that glitters...

You can take an investor and plug them into a new world. You can use a broadband connection, have your server packed with the creme-de-la-creme of role-playing aficionados, running the game on a desktop PC that costs more than the down payment on a house and watch the dream come alive. The suits won't know what hit them.

You show them the predictions for Internet infiltration and shove graphs in their face screaming about EverQuest's 400,000 players - generating about \$9 million a month - and then bring out the Jupiter Media Metrix analysis that says subscribers will go from paying US\$259 million last year to US\$1.5 billion in 2006.

Next, you use the example of newcomer Dark Age of Camelot managing to take it to the big boys as a feasibility study and then you mention that even as Sony is launching a new first person shooter MMOG called Planetside, it is also taking EverQuest on to the PS2 as well as looking into licensing Marvel Comics and the Terminator for online worlds. After that, your claim that massively multiplayer gaming is the gateway to mountains of cash doesn't seem so far fetched.

Jumping the bandwagon

Then you get the money. After you get the money you go into production on: Mankind, Iritor Online, Neocron, Dragon Empires, Blackmoon Chronicles, Priston Tale, Atriarch, Horizons, Karma Immortality, Planetside, Sovereign, Realms of Torment, Enigma Rising Tide, Time of Defiance, Priest, Eschaton Online, Shattered Galaxy, Cryptids, Shadow Bane, City of Heroes, 3rd World, Earth & Beyond, Battlefield 1942, Project Entropia, Warhammer Online, A Desert Tale, Citizen Zero and the list goes on.

The path of gaming follows the money trail. It's a simple fact, but one that can lead developers to woe. As far as I - and most normal people - are concerned, the age of mass online gaming is still years off, unless you're talking about online Spades.

For one, the technology just isn't ready yet. Downloading 4MB of patches and updates every time you log on is only so much fun on a dial-up account and as we know, we don't have that much broadband penetration yet.

Beyond buggy networking you have to

have the content generation technology to create enough interesting missions to keep everyone happily busy.

Aussie MMOG Citizen Zero's solution to this eternal problem is interesting: when you look on the Net for a mission, the game examines your stats, level and location and generates tailor-made objectives. This is great but then you have the problem of interacting with others. What if someone vastly more powerful decides to tag along and steal your experience, or if someone else just hands you the item you're looking for, or if filthy Farmers stumble across your treasure first? Sure, you could block all this but then what's the point of having all these people around?

133+ culture

Once we get past technology problems we run into people problems. Our lack of an oral storytelling tradition doesn't create people with great role-playing skills. We are too used to watching TV or playing avatars who have multiple-choice conversations or do all their talking with weaponry.

Then you have the fact that everyone who can pay gets to play, when maybe MMOG administrators should be a little more selective. Sounds elitist. Well, maybe it is, but imagine giving the worst little snot of a brother a muscular adult body, enough guns to take on Iraq and the anonymity of a virtual mask to hide behind.

Let's say you find the ideal group of friends to adventure with - they're witty, helpful, loyal and busting with character (I'll admit it happens and that's why EverQuest has 400k subscribers). You had better be pretty dedicated. If all of your group spends a heap of time online then you're almost guaranteed to find companions whenever you log on, but if they're spending that much time online, you'd better be putting in the four hours a day to keep up.

If you organise to meet at a set time then that's just a different kind of dedication. Where does that leave the 99 per cent of the population who have other serious hobbies as well?

So new MMOGs face a unique challenge. With a game model that, by its very design, cannot appeal to the casual gamers, where are you going to find the numbers to populate your games? But on the flipside, if, as a developer, you're forced to target the hardcore, then how do you drag them away from their already

established adventuring groups?

The only way is to generate enough hype to make entire parties switch games at a time. How many of these games will be able to do that? Star Wars Galaxies and World of Warcraft might on the strength of the franchises and City of Heroes might on the strength of the superhero revival, but that's about it.

This is all without looking at the costs of running dedicated servers, having 24-hour support, continuous development and a team of dungeon masters pulling the strings.

Where normal gamers will generally buy several games to play at once, or at least in rapid succession month after month, very few hardcore gamers have time for more than one MMOG, making the competition that much tougher.

Even if the technology and culture was ready, the art is not. Massively multiplayer games are a very young field of study and one restricted to, and created by, bleeding-edge gamers. We still make games that are like D&D and hook players by setting up the dream of the great adventure around the next corner, after you kill ten more rats and get ten more gold pieces.

Seriously?

If you're serious about making a MMOG, by all means try - but wait a few years. Let the big boys work out the kinks. Let the Sims Online and the TV marketing campaign it will warrant launch MMOGs into the mainstream consciousness. Wait for Bill Gates to pour the equivalent of Australia's national debt into Xbox Live. Let people play NBA seasons, racing games and whatever Tony Hawk rip-off together online to get them used to virtual communities and move them into being "social and cool" from "fringe and dork".

Wait for broadband to snare the majority of gamers (note well that Telstra notices jumps in demand every time it lowers the price). Never forget, in this business, a lukewarm reception is the worst disaster - you might have to keep that limp game on life support even as the cash drains away and ends never quite meet.

If you're just trying to get funded, please, please come up with a brilliant concept toting enough enthusiasm to be able to enchant some investor with half a brain. Save us from the cash-in. Save us from the clone wars. Remember this one thing: all that glitters shouldn't go gold.

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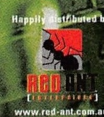
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They're coming to get us

The military has usually been the first to take advantage of any new technology the world has to offer. The telegraph, radar, integrated circuitry - you name it and the military, in particular the US military, has always had it first. You thought you were the first kid on the block with a GeForce4 Ti4600, didn't you? Sorry, they've been running the instrument panels in F-18s since 1987. Well not really, but you know what we mean.

This has never really been a concern to gamers. In fact, we applaud any development that will eventually filter its way down to the civilian market. But what happens when the Military Industrial Complex starts to absorb the games industry itself?

Virtual military crackdown

Late last year, Bohemia Interactive and the US Marines announced that they were going to work together on the Virtual Battlefield System, a training program based on the game design used in Operation Flashpoint but written to run on super computers. Sound cool? Hell yes, but what does it really mean in the long term?

Let us take a hypothetical situation and say that Bohemia develops a seriously kick-arse AI system for the VBS - the best ever made. Let's also say that, because of the serious military amounts of money involved, they are also able to develop some revolutionary 3D technology for their new training program.

The job gets finished and the Marines take possession of their brand spanking new Virtual Battlefield System from the lads at Bohemia, who return to their previous dull lives as PC game developers. With all that new found expertise and experience under their belts, the Bohemia lads decide to make another kick-arse combat game and complete work on OFP2: Get A Dog Up Ya.

Unfortunately for them however, some smart trousers at the US Department of Fun Deprivation notices a similarity between the new game and the VBS and before you can say "texture compression" the whole staff of Bohemia are hauled out to Guantanamo Bay where they're left to rot with David Hicks and other assorted US traitors.

They're coming to get us

Sounds implausible? Does anyone remember

Mordechai Vanunu, that Israeli scientist who escaped to Australia many years ago to tell the world about Israel's illegal nuclear weapons program? He's still in prison and all he did was tell a few people what the Super Powers already knew. Or on a more related topic, the murder of Joseph (Danny) Casolaro by shady US government types for his investigations into the use of PROMIS computer software by the CIA back in the eighties. If you're interested, you can get the full details of this case at: <http://pdr.autono.net/promis.html>

The bottom line is this, when you start messing with the big boys, you never know where you're going to end up. Let's take another scenario. What if Bohemia or another company develops some wonderful new code or compression technique that has universal gaming applications, but because they developed it as

Iraqis were buying them up to use their processors as part of the guidance system for their Scud missiles. It was probably rubbish but not completely implausible.

Not only is gaming technology becoming part of the military, eventually it will surpass it. That may sound ridiculous but look around. As the nature of global war regresses into smaller and more primitive conflicts, investment in hyper-advanced military hardware slows down. Just take the virtual cancellation of the F-22 fighter program and the Crusader, the US Army's new Self-Propelled Artillery system as examples.

Consumer markets however, keep rolling along, maybe to the point where domestic technology overtakes the military for the first time ever, simply because the demand for the military stuff isn't as strong. So what happens then, when the latest nVIDIA graphics card is powerful enough to send men to Mars? Will they even be allowed to make such things? Will Matrox's advertising have to have "Dependant on US Government Approval" written on the ads for all their new products? Could the release of a game be considered a threat to national security? Hell yes!

Art imitating life

Many science fiction writers have speculated on the future being ruled by mega corporations rather than governments, but could these developments be the trigger to cause such a thing? As multinational companies continue to gather technological momentum, will they want to bow to the pressure of one government to make them tow the line? What would happen if the US government banned Microsoft from releasing the Xbox 2 because it could be very helpful to Saddam's nuclear program, for example? Probably nothing. But if it was 10 years from now and the ban was over the Xbox 4 or 5, how big will Microsoft be by then? Maybe they'll

just say something like:

"Hmm, we could trash all our stock of Xbox 5s or we could just overthrow the government and tell the president to go suck an egg!"

It's going to be fascinating finding out!



part of some military bullcrap they have to keep it a secret and can never pass it on to the games industry as a whole. For example, what if Microsoft had developed DirectX as part of some military project, where would we be now? Still playing DOS-based games?

To the future!

As we hurtle towards a hyper-advanced gaming future, we are also becoming a part of a much bigger entity. When Sony released the PS2 in Japan there were stories circulating that the

The Guerilla Gamer is a jaded and embittered veteran gaming journalist who has had too many small bitter alcoholic drinks in the back rooms of seedy inner-city gaming cafes. His views do not necessarily have any bearing on anything we might say in this magazine in an official capacity. And we wear our trousers every day, without fail.

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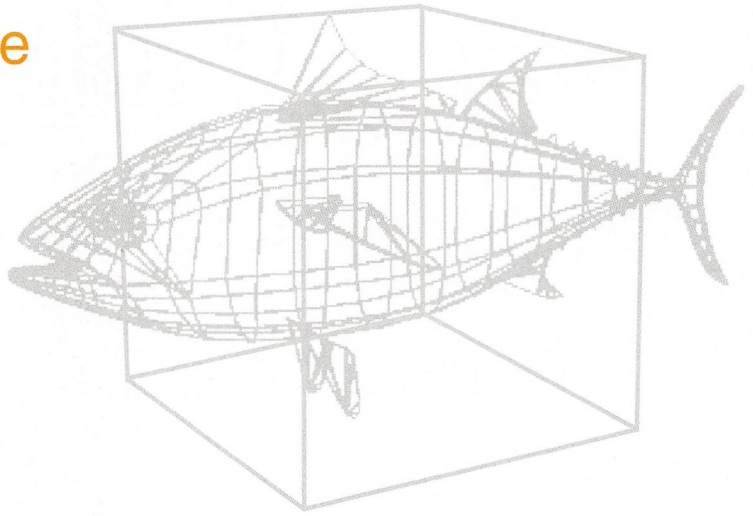
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Tear down the Marketecture



Wednesday, August 7, 2002: **RADEON 9700** PRO delivers double the performance of any graphics card available. The 9700 PRO is the world's fastest and most advanced graphics board. Do these little titbits ring hollow to you? "Most advanced" is interesting if you know what this actually means and reading about the trademarked features of video adaptors is not anyone's idea of titillation.

Display adaptors were characterised by resolution, colour depth and refresh rate, but now they're characterised by fashionable words. What nVIDIA calls NSR - the nVIDIA Shading Rasterizer - is called Pixel Tapestry II by ATI. The funky CHARISMA ENGINE III is nothing else but the Radeon's integrated transform and lighting unit, formerly called a geometric unit. SMOOTHVISION 2.0 technology is no more than Full Scene Anti-Aliasing and anisotropic filtering like Quincunx et al. All the cunning words simply hide basic functionality and confuse the consumer.

The essential challenge in delivering wicked 3D content remains increasing performance against dawdling improvements in memory capability. Memory and graphics bus bandwidth are the critical factors in determining 3D performance and quality. The nature of the graphics problem places strain on all parts of a PC's subsystems. Different components of a game stress various components, which often results in the performance of a specific game limited by one system component at a given instant and a different component a split second later. The three significant stressors of a system are computational load, geometry computation and pixel rendering. A little knowledge of how games work, rather than memorising marketing terms or 'Marketecture', is necessary to understanding the various features of modern video adaptors. A typical game title has four main components: game logic, scene management, geometry calculation and pixel rendering.

Game logic

Enthralling 3D games require several elements to keep us interested and amused. Game logic, physics, AI, networking, interactivity, sound and other non-graphical functions are some examples and are all driven by the game engine. In order to create an experience,

developers will allocate a majority of the CPU's processing power to tasks that directly create these non-graphical elements for the player's experience. To the extent that other aspects of the game can be offloaded from the CPU, more CPU power can be dedicated to those elements.

Scene management

This is the process of calculating what portion of the viewable 'world' will be rendered at the right time. All contemporary techniques require trade-offs between computational cost, memory requirement and accuracy. Most GPUs actually end up processing many times the amount of data than is actually displayed on the monitor. Increasing the efficiency of scene management processing can improve the performance of some GPUs, but often comes at the cost of increasing the CPU load for these functions, which can detract from the grunt available for the game logic.

Geometry calculations

Once the game engine calculates what portion of the scene to process (or render), the game passes that subset of its 'world' database to the geometry pipeline of the graphics engine. These computations typically involve transforming the geometry and lighting it. Hardware transform and lighting lets the 3D chip do the power hungry, floating point calculations that make a scene out of a 3D world ('transforming'), remove the objects that are outside of the viewable area ('clipping' and 'occluding') and give each vertex a light vector after computing the 3D scene and its light sources ('lighting'). By offloading the geometry burden from the host processor, more of the CPU is made available for game logic.

Geometry bandwidth

Shifting the computational load to the GPU was a key factor in allowing content developers the freedom to move from minimally constructed scenes to extremely complex, life-like worlds. At high resolutions and colour depths, it's common for each memory frame buffer to contain 15-20MB of 3D geometric information. While an individual frame certainly would not stretch a basic PC, the requirement to run this load at 60 or 70fps makes it a bit of a challenge, as the nearly 1GB of bandwidth

required for such a task will strain every aspect of a PC to its limits.

Memory bandwidth

The frame buffer, which is the memory attached directly to the GPU, holds information such as colour, depth values, textures and geometry and is typically the highest bandwidth memory system in a PC. It's also the most expensive part of a typical adaptor and therefore critical to make the most of this expensive sub-component. By increasing the efficiency with which the GPU renders pixels, dramatic improvements in performance can be achieved without increasing the memory bandwidth of the frame buffer. By improving the speed of the frame buffer and improving the efficiency with which pixels are rendered, dramatic breakthroughs in performance are possible. Because 3D graphics are so dependent upon memory bandwidth, the memory controller is at the crux of the bottleneck for improving performance.

Z stuff

A typical GPU vendor bangs on about Z technology which is also at the core of bandwidth issues. Depth is the feature that makes 3D games look three dimensional, so it's not surprising that the Z-plane plays an important role in the generation of three-dimensional scenes. Overlapping layers do the rest to make the Z-buffer the busiest part of the memory subsystem, consequently also using up the majority of bandwidth. There are several ways bandwidth can be conserved. One is Z-compression so that the bandwidth is not as fully consumed by data traffic as it might otherwise be and another is Z-occlusion or hiding pixels that do not need rendering because they won't be visible to the game player. As well, the Z-buffers themselves are now cleared quicker, avoiding redundant pipeline activity.

Make no mistakes

Feel better? Trademarked hype is difficult to see through most of the time. Read the Marketecture if you have to, but understand what it is you need and what you're paying for. Even if you're only a little Net-savvy, you can join a hardware forum on the Internet and discover some real-world experiences that may just point you in the right direction.

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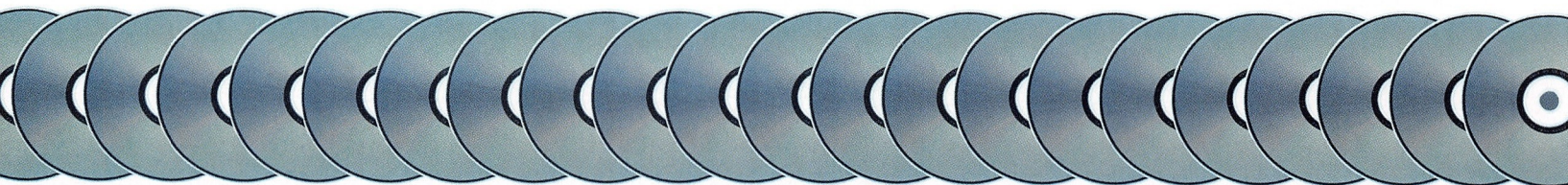
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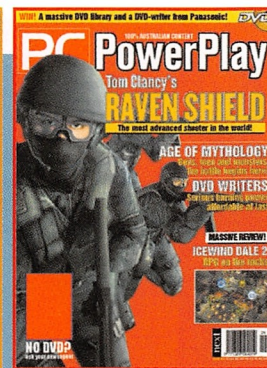
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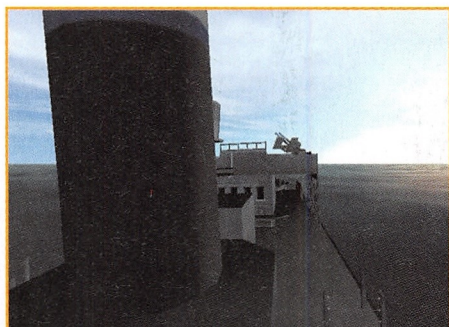
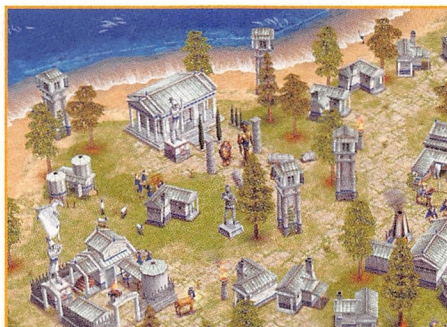
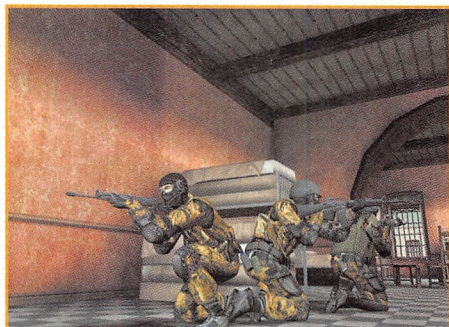
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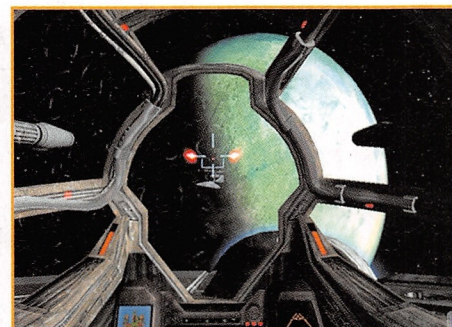


INPREVIEW

They give us the code, we give you the lowdown



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We have some exciting previews for you this month. Utilising the new and amazing feature set of the Unreal 2 engine and offering the latest innovations for a squad-based FPS, Raven Shield is set to flashbang its way into all our hearts. Age of Mythology replaces tanks with hydras, among other mythological beasts, and there are six other previews that you'll have to discover from the contents because it's time for another of my little stories.

The public beta for Battlefield 1942 has just been released and as a huge fan of team-based twitch online gaming I was eager to try it out. Sadly, ADSL is the only form of broadband connectivity available in my area so I'm forced to use Telstra and have to take their 3GB cap up the proverbial like so many others. Wireplay, a division of Telstra that looks after online gaming at least had the decency to set up an internal server that didn't count towards your usage, but given the anarchy that it quickly deteriorated into, they needn't have bothered.

I had just logged on, the massive ships of the Japanese fleet loomed in the distance and I was about to gasp in awe when suddenly, WHAM! Someone driving a jeep decided I was to be their next target. No problem, accidents can happen so I respawned, ready to take in more of BF1942. Hello, what's this? Another ally has spawned with me on the same reinforcement's cycle. I turned to him to offer a friendly wave when he raised his rifle, pointed it at me and shot me dead.

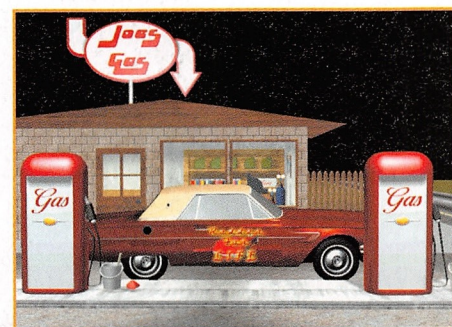
On Wireplay, the most dangerous part of BF1942 isn't facing off with the enemy to stop them from advancing on your position, it's spawning. In BF1942 players respawn collectively at set time periods for cooperative

reasons except on Wireplay everyone just bolts as soon as they spawn to escape the griever waiting for the next batch of easy targets.

I will admit there were moments amidst the fracas where I laughed harder than I had ever before. The funniest sight was the Allies trying to get just one plane in the air. It went something like this: some poor schmuck would run as fast as he could to a plane on the runway, jump in, pump the throttle to full and try to take off. Of course all efforts failed as bullets from the surrounding grievers tore through the plane's hull, turning it into an exploding wreck. This cycle endlessly repeated itself and not once did a single Allied plane make it into the air. In all, by my own side I was run over by jeeps, bazooka'd, grenaded, shelled by a tank, hit with artillery and shot countless times.

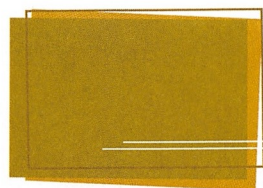
Sometimes however, mistakes do happen and on the occasion that I actually managed to make it into a jeep and pick up a player that wasn't shooting at me it still went hopelessly wrong. In my excitement I went roaring up the road not realising we were on a cliffy South Pacific Island. The next thing I knew, a corner had screamed by and my fine jeep was experiencing some serious air time as it zoomed off the edge towards its watery grave. I turned to the right to admire the view on the way down when I was confronted with one of the funniest video game moments I've ever had. The other player I had picked up had turned to face me and was just staring at my avatar. I could literally hear his scream of "YOU IDIOT" through the monitor.

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Tom Clancy's RAVEN





It's the biggest hi-tech ultra-realistic shooter franchise in the civilised universe. The guns are real. The situations are real. The engine is Unreal Warfare. The consulting developer is Red Storm. The interviewer is **Timothy C Best**. When all these forces combine, you get the phattest preview yet. Raven Shield is the utter bleeding edge in military simulation. Can you stomach it? Tuck in.

SHIELD



You know the tangos are close. You can't hear them over the gentle creaking of the building or the low hum of the air conditioner but the stillness in the air screams tension and frayed nerves.

You put the heartbeat sensor up to your eyes and see two hearts pulsating beyond the next door. You hear the soft buzz of the goggles as their powerful parabolic mic picks up the distinctive sound of a human heart, calculates the distance and translates it into a computer generated image.

One heart is beating fast and erratic, the other is slower. The hostage is scared out of his wits. Luckily, the tango seems quite calm, oblivious to your team only metres away. You whisper into your headset, "One tango on the far right wall at 11 o'clock, hostage at two o'clock. Open and clear. We are in five."

Hand gestures count down as two of your team move to the door - Philips to open it, Lopez to roll in the flashbang, Jones and Anderson to enter and take the shot.

As your hands hit zero no-one is watching - they are already moving. The door opens, the flashbang explodes, you see both hearts start beating wildly, hear the distinctive bark of the TAR-21

What's in a Clancy?

We here at PCPP may have, in the past, sometimes suggested that a big name might have been attached to a product just to move units. We may have asserted that their agent would have more to do with said production than the named individual.

That isn't the case here, Lebbos insists: "The name of the game is Tom Clancy's Rainbow Six so he gives us input on the story, he gives us input on the game. We send him the first version of the game, we send him the last version of the game on which he has his word," he says.

The team maintains that the writing and story of the game is the best part of the game: "It is a Clancy title," Lebbos adds and he guards it like a state secret. All we know for sure is what we've learnt from the screen shots and that it's set four years after Rogue Spear.

assault rifle and then there is only one heart pulsating wildly. The tango has been neutralised.

This is the story that Raven Shield producer Chadi Lebbos tells me with excitement cutting through his French-Canadian accent. The accent is French-Canadian because number three in the series of Rainbow Six games is being made by Ubi Soft Montreal.

Lebbos says that his team is working closely with Red Storm Entertainment, sending them every new version of the game and getting their feedback to ensure that Raven Shield is Rainbow Six down to the last go code.

That's not to say that Lebbos' crew have just been custodians of the title. They have instead gone hell for leather to make a game that's not only authentic in Rainbow Six feel but which takes the already nail-biting counter-terrorism to the next level of intensity, realism and fun.

Gunmetal polish

The first evolution players will notice about Raven Shield is the way it looks. The team has moved from the proprietary graphics and to the impressive Unreal Warfare engine.

Lebbos says that using Unreal let them focus on game content while having access to incredible character animation, sound, lighting and level design possibilities.

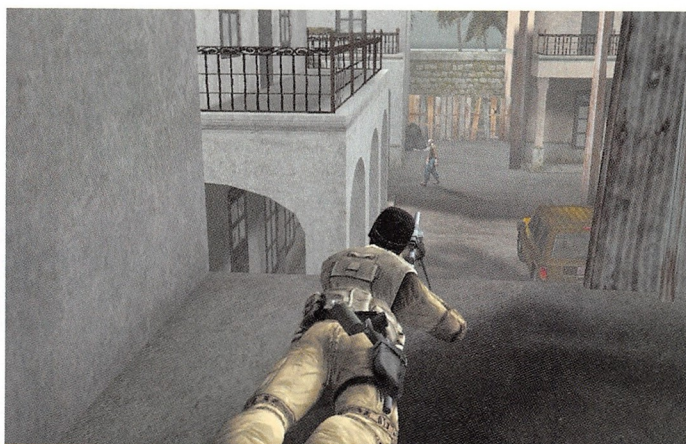
Besides a general improvement in graphical quality and access to all the Unreal Warfare modding tools for level designers, the engine offers new gameplay elements.

For example, now you don't have to check inventory screens or ever lose track of what people are carrying.

Not only can you see the types of grenades on belts but you'll now see weapons holstered on the hip or slung over the back ... there's no need for rubber gloves to find where that guy keeps his shotgun anymore. This should be particularly interesting in multiplayer where good recon with



Good on you Goober, shoot your commanding officer in the back of the head



"I'll fire a warning shot into his butt."



Damn Yuppies, drinking their café lattes...

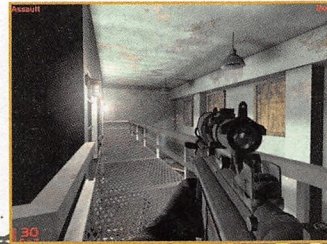
Locales

You'd think you were trying to pry into national secrets trying to get information about the levels (and hence the plot of the game) from the team, but we did manage to dig up some info.

For one, all the levels are about close quarter combat, like in the previous games, although they are a bit bigger. Chad Lebbo says, "All of our maps are based on real-world locations and like I said before, we are not like Ghost Recon, with wide open areas. It is all about going into a place in a blitz manner, cleaning the job and leaving afterwards. You can only do that in a claustrophobic areas kind-of-thing."

The screens you see here are from the carefully re-created London Bank level and the South American Import / Export company.

Lebbo says one of the most amazing things about the maps is the level of detail and ambience. He says stepping out of the bank is like stepping into London and that in South America you'll feel the damp. We'll see Lebbo, we'll see.



TISM against terror!



This is the ol' bill. Come out wiv yer hands above yer 'ead.

a zooming scope should let you know just what to expect (and who you need gas masks to approach).

Then there is the beauty of brutally blunt gunmetal. For the first time in a Rainbow Six game, players will be able to see the guns their character is toting. There are 57 weapons all up, all lovingly modelled.

Ridiculous levels of attention have have been reached in immersing players in the role of a member of Rainbow Six. "When you reload a P90 it doesn't load like an MP5. When you reload when you are completely empty or if you reload when you are half empty it's not the same reload animation," Lebbo says happily. "Everything that is related to weaponry and guns is intense and the players will notice it a lot."

Flashbangs are even more effective than before, causing more dramatic camera movement and with longer-lasting effects. In multiplayer Lebbo says you know you've used one well by all the swearing. Little touches like the retina burn left by the flash and the fact that the tear gas is now clear, all point to a satisfying level of obsession.

In the trenches

Lebbo talks with a mixture of pride and a grimace when he details what the team went through to

reach this insanity-inducing level of detail: "We had terrain experience with many of those weapons - for example, we a chance (or the bad luck) to experience what the gas grenade is like."

"We went with our own municipal SWAT team and they trained us on how we move and how we hold guns, etc. We fired MP-5s, we fired PSG-1s; we fired all sorts of guns."

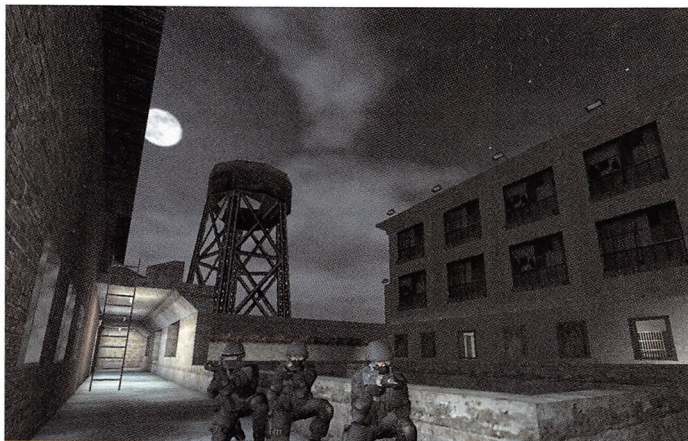
"We saw what the flashbangs are all about so it helped us a lot in terms of visualisation. This helped us a lot in bringing the realism to the game."

I know the team at Red Storm took weapons and movement training but I think Ubisoft Montreal one-upped them with the gassing.

Beyond personal experience, there was the calling in of experienced personnel. The team hired Dane Tracks, the company that recorded weapon sounds for the Matrix, to go out and record every gun in the game. Using 12 positional mics, Dan Tracks recorded the guns firing, being reloaded, running out of ammo, indoors and outside.

As Lebbo says, "When you are shooting an AK-47 it's like, oh my God, it's like the roof is falling on my head ... it is so powerful."

Ubisoft Montreal made sure Mike Grasso, the technical advisor from the previous Rainbow Six games, was also on hand. Grasso, who



Under cover of dark, the Beta-Phis attempt a raid on the girls' dorms

survived 22 years on the LAPD, was consulted on team tactics for movies such as Heat and The Rock. He made several trips north of the border to show the programmers how different weapons recoil and so on, but most importantly to school them on realistic team behaviour.

The Armoury

Raven Shield features all of the weapons and ammo types from the previous games as well as adding four sub-machineguns: MTAR-21 9mm, Mac-11/9 9mm, Micro-Uzi 9mm and SR-2 9mm; two assault rifles: TAR-21 5.56mm and the Type 95 5.56mm; the USAS-12 12g shotgun and the VSS Vintorez 9x39mm sniper rifle. Each gun can be further modified with a mini-scope (adding zoom capabilities), sound suppressors or a C-mag for extra ammo.

To make things more Rambo, you can now use the Micro-Uzi as a secondary weapon instead of a pistol. It ups your firepower, but lowers accuracy as you let it rip one-handed.

Out of the new additions the M-11 is tipped to become a fan favourite. Apparently the 16 bullets per second spray clears a room like bad leper jokes (with the downside of hitting empty in a heartbeat and being very close ranged). For ending parties that have dragged on just that couple of hours too long, the kids love it.

Alpha Team primed

It looks like Grasso's work paid off. In the past it was annoying that your crack team of troops acted like a team of troops on crack. Now, Lebbos assures me, you feel like you are a part of a deadly team. As you move forward, you see your teammates' heads sweep from side to side as they cover you.

"You can give orders to your team, like when you come to a door, to 'open, flash and clear,'" says

Lebbos. "They will open up, throw in a flashbang, neutralise the threats and, when they have neutralised everybody, they will say 'clear' like they have done their job and they will reform on you."

The team AI has been made so impressive that players could complete the game without personally firing a shot. It is a powerful dynamic of the game - but the eight inch bowie knife cuts both ways.

Since your team works together, now the terrorists work in groups too. They take cover, call in back-up, pin you down with a spray of bullets and then lob grenades, make a run for it and then hide behind a corner in ambush for you and so on. There are so many permutations.

Maybe you'll enter a room just in time to see the tango leg it out the far door. What you don't know is he's raised the alarm and you now have four goons coming up behind you.

Be prepared

The best way to keep operatives alive is taking out the tango before he raises the alarm with a mix of caution, overpowering force and

good recon. Getting that overpowering force in position and that good recon without blowing your position takes either prodigious FPS juju or a well-run plan.

Rainbow Six veteran players would pore over the map, assign operatives to teams, set their paths through the maps, set aggressiveness versus stealth, issue orders for door breaches and tie them all together with radio go-codes to control exactly when they moved. For many it was a great joy.

Others found it a great pain, so in Raven Shield moves have been made to appeal to both the grand architect and the free-form gamer.

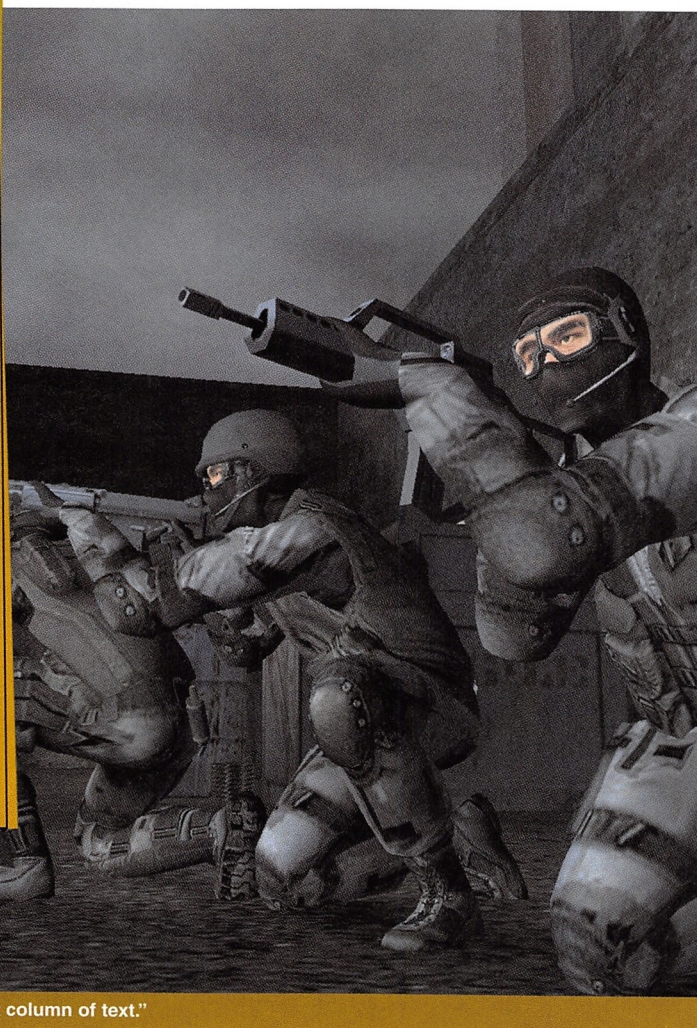
Lebbos explains that while they haven't removed a single option, they have done a lot of work on the interface to make it more accessible. Players now place waypoints using the left mouse-button and choose behaviour and set go codes from a right-click menu.

The biggest change to the planning stage is the addition of a 3D window. Players can plot and see the plan in full 3D, rotating the camera around 360 degrees to scope out every angle. Once a plan is finished it can be played out in the virtual representation. Now it's not just a planning phase, it's moving towards being a simulation phase.

In-game controls also offer an alternative to a laborious planning stage. Now, when you approach a door, for example, you can press the spacebar and a list of commands will appear so that you can set exactly how you want your team to handle this breach - just like you could set their actions in the planning phase.

Second sight

The main gadget to make an appearance in Raven Shield is



"On the count of three, take out that column of text."



closely linked to the in-game planning. It is the heartbeat sensor. The sensor has evolved into goggles which allow you to see tangerines through walls along the lines of what's in the intro. No longer are the heartbeat sensors a short-range "radar". Now they are a vision mode that is very effective but takes two hands to use. Since high-powered weapons can now penetrate walls, this can be a deadly tool - but make sure it's not a hostage on the other side of the wall, it looks really bad in the paperwork.

The second big gizmo is also vision-related, being thermal graphic vision for snipers allowing them to see through walls by tracking heat. While the sniper rifles can still only fire through doors and windows, the sniper has become much more of a communicator, giving the rest of the team the heads-up on terrorists' movements while providing cover.

This value-adding to make the sniper more involved is an example of many small touches in Raven Shield that seem minor but have a great effect on the game.

One of the most impressive features in this category is the ability to only open doors a crack.

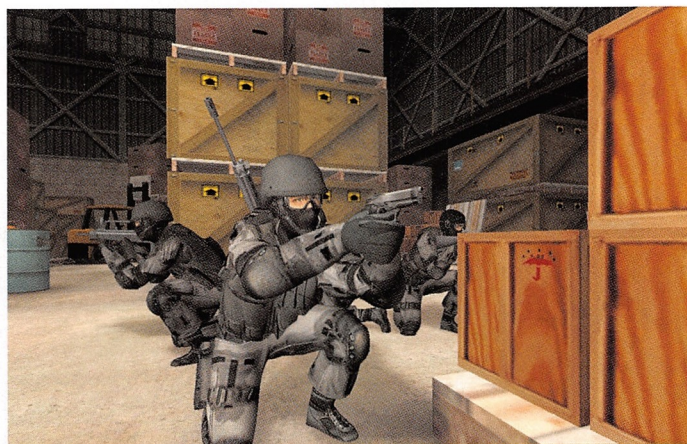
Using the mouse wheel you can slowly open doors as much or as little as you want, which is great for staying in cover while rolling in a surprise grenade, or just opening the door enough to shoot through.

Crouching and leaning has also had the "analogue" treatment. Now you can slowly peek over window sills and boxes, rising from a crouch all the way to standing, which again is great for stealth and presenting a low profile. Now you can pop up just enough to snap off a shot and drop back down. Players have much more control and the game becomes just that little bit more intense as you have to watch for more subtle approaches.

On the other end of the scale, players can now charge up or slide down ladders, gaining speed but being anything but subtle. It's all about giving players tactical control so they can run missions in a way that would make detail-anal Tom Clancy proud.

Rainbow is go

When Clancy decided that games were a new media worth exploring, Red Storm Entertainment took his love of gizmo-filled realism and



Damn! The villainous wooden crates are conspiring against us

created the defining squad-based urban SWAT game, upping the stakes by setting it against a world-shaking backdrop.

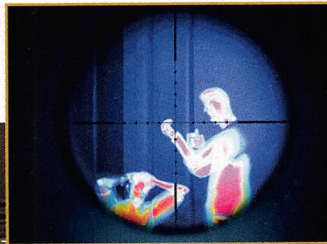
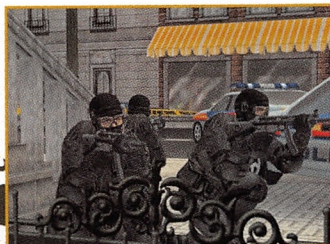
Ubisoft Montreal makes it clear from the outset that it wanted to make a game that is undeniably Rainbow Six in feel, but a true evolution in the series. You can see the team's dedication in all the little touches (not to mention saying 'bring it on' to tear gas) and you can hear it in Lebbos' voice when he outlines what players will love about this game: "I don't

think there will be one thing. For Rainbow Six it has always been the whole experience.

"First person weapons, outstanding graphics that immerses a player in his environment, an AI that makes you feel like you are part of a team, terrorists that are meaner and more dangerous than ever ... this is really going to be an outstanding game," he says.

From what we've seen, it looks like he's telling the truth.

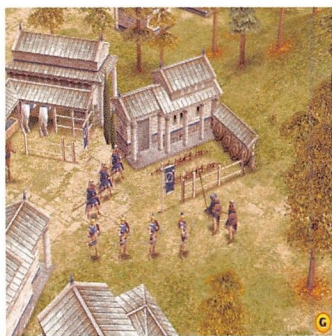
Timothy C. Best



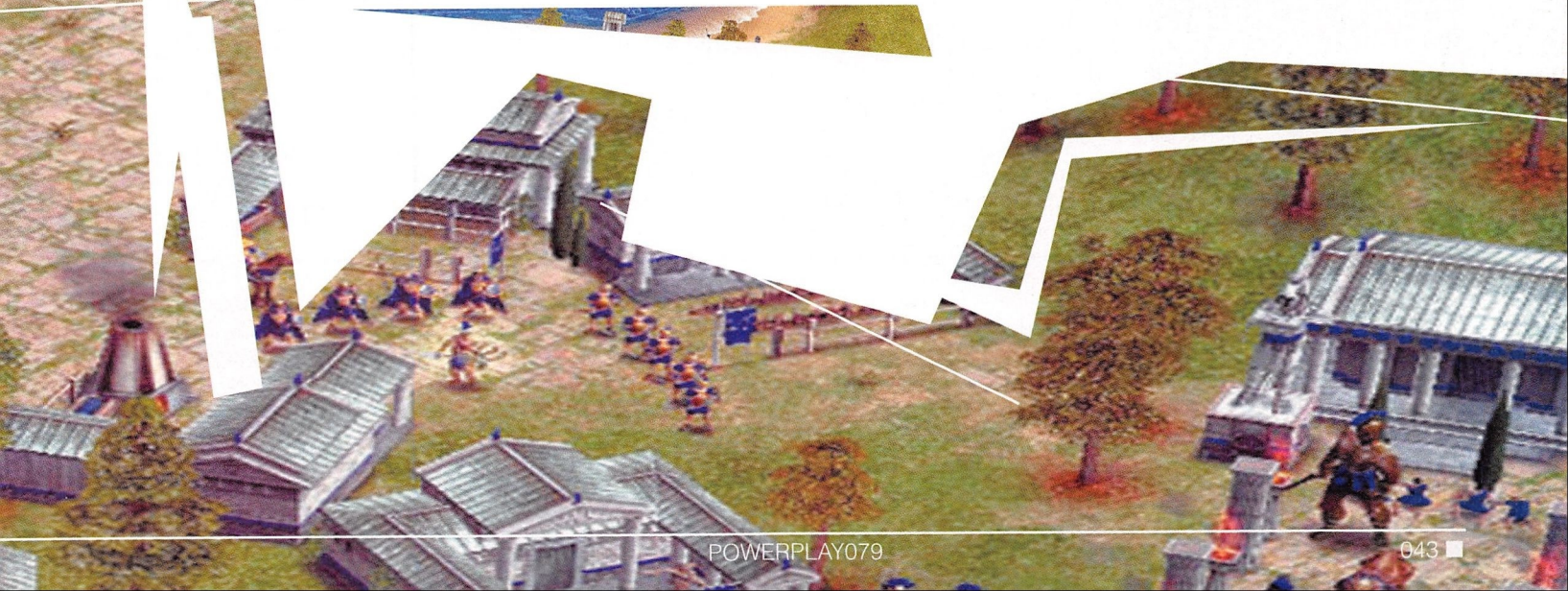
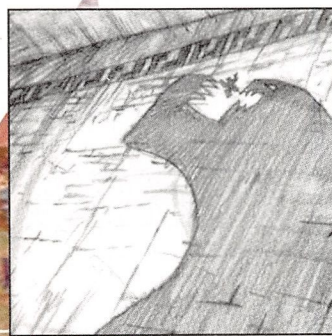


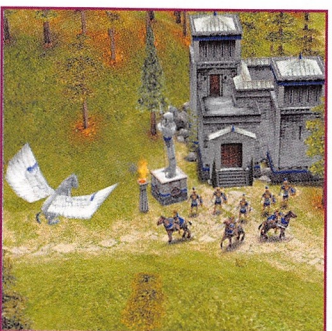
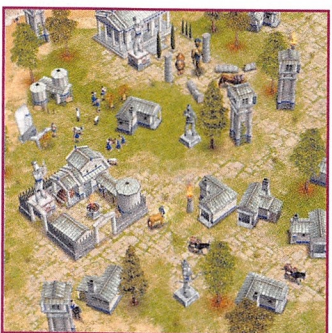
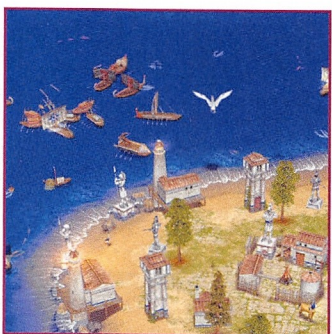
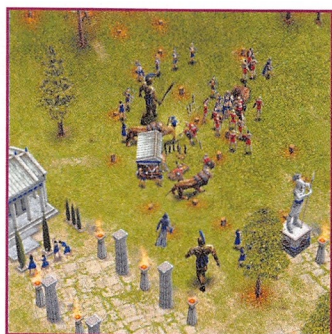
GODS AND MONSTERS

AN INTIMATE LAST-MINUTE LOOK AT AGE OF MYTHOLOGY



It has been developed at what has felt like an almost glacial pace, but Age of Mythology is now close to ready and we couldn't help but check in with Ensemble Studios for one more pre-release peek at what might just be the RTS of the year. **Steve Polak** discussed deities and demigods with the man behind the game, Bruce Shelley.





PCPP: So what inspired you to develop Age of Mythology?

Bruce: We wanted to do something different to Age 2, yet still build on the success of the series. We thought it would be cool to add new elements like the 3D visuals, the god powers and the whole mythology thing with the different groups or pantheons.

PCPP: Why did you settle on the three pantheons that have finally ended up in the game?

Bruce: We looked at a lot of mythologies, but settled on the Norse, Egyptian and Greek civilisations because they didn't represent any existing civilisations, they had lots of interesting elements to them and were quite different, so we could design a game around them with variety in terms of the different sides you controlled.

PCPP: Were there any which you left out?

Bruce: We looked at others, like the Sioux Indians, but we decided for the moment we had three and that was enough.

PCPP: There is always room in the expansion pack, eh? Tell us about the triumvirate you went with.

Bruce: The Greeks are a pretty powerful civilisation and they are most like Age 2, and so they serve as a good place to start. They have excellent infantry and lots of interesting myth units. The Norse fight and defend well. The Norse group is more suited to aggressive approaches as they are a very mobile civilisation and they have the ability to attack and run quickly. The Norse gain favour by doing well in combat and are rewarded for killing enemy units with favours from the gods. They also collect resources differently. They use an ox cart to gather resources and this

We just had a test phase with about a half-dozen college students. We flew them in and they played Age for about two weeks straight and we fed them pizza... We called them the 'Olympic Team'.

is good because it is mobile, but it is also very much more vulnerable. The Norse buildings are made of wood too and are a bit weaker than the other two civilisations. Finally the Egyptians are the best base builders and can build massive structures which add to their power and are really hard to destroy. However, they aren't as good at assaulting the enemy in the field of battle, at least in the early stages of the game. So each group has their own strengths and weaknesses. The Egyptian early military units are quite weak, but they get stronger later in the game.

PCPP: This presents challenges when it comes to play testing no doubt?

Bruce: We have made sure that we have tested the game more thoroughly than ever before. In this area we have hired some of the best players in the world (people like AOE 2 US champ Jerry Perry) to work on our test team to make sure that the game is better play balanced this time. We feel that this combined with our test days has helped make the game better this time around.

PCPP: How did that go?

Bruce: We just had a test phase with about a half-dozen college students. We flew them in and they played Age for about two weeks straight and we fed them pizza and paid them for their feedback and this was very helpful indeed. We called them the 'Olympic Team' and they had a great time. They were initially concerned about the

appeal of the Norse, but once some of our in-house testers showed the students the strengths of the Norse, they liked them a lot more. It is just that the Norse in particular requires different strategies and approaches which rely on mobility and attacks if you are looking to be successful. They also wanted to be able to map the hot keys to their individual tastes.

PCPP: So how does the major new resource - Favour - work in the game?

Bruce: What we did is we eliminated stone and we replaced it with favour. You spend favour to get the myth units, to trigger god powers and make other improvements to your civilisation. Each of the three different cultures gets favour in different ways. The Norse get favour by killing enemy units, which the gods reward them for. The Greeks gather favour in a more traditional way. They send villagers to worship at the temple, which the gods reward them for. The Egyptian's culture generates favour through the building of monuments. There are five of these and they cost a lot, but deliver a great deal of power once you have built them all.

PCPP: Do you need favour for certain improvements?

Bruce: Buildings like the Egyptian fortress require favour so you will need to spend it wisely.

PCPP: One of the criticisms of the previous games in the series is that the sides are too similar. Have you

Be God for A Day

One of the most significant new features in Age of Mythology is the fact that it gives you god powers you can call on. Bruce gives us the low down on his favourite omnipotent tricks.

CURSE is really fun. You cast it and between one and seven of the enemy units turn to pigs, which you can then use for food, which is pretty funny.

NIDHOGG is a cool power in that it essentially creates a flying dragon which Loki summons for you and the dragon can do huge amounts of damage, burning units or forests. He can only be shot at with archers and so he can attack many large armies without much fire coming his way.

There is also **EARTHQUAKE**, which levels buildings, especially those in the Norse town. **METEOR SHOWER** is fun, so is **TORNADO**. **WALKING WOODS** is very clever. You cast it on trees and they uproot themselves and attack buildings and stuff.

addressed this issue in AOM?

Bruce: I think so. We listened to our fans and decided that it was important to make the sides more different as it was something which we were criticised about.

PCPP: We understand the sides are not only different, but you can also choose which lesser gods you follow, which changes the civilisation advantages you get.

Bruce: Yes. We now have multiple paths you can take as you go through the ages and level up your civilisation. The starting choices are familiar gods such as Odin, Thor and Zeus, but then within each pantheon there are other lesser gods you can choose from which give you specific abilities and at each stage when you progress through an age, you get to choose one of two gods, so you can quite distinctly determine the kind of path you take depending on the sorts of bonuses which suit you. Some gods will be better at defence or have better attacking powers and these are the choices you have to make as you go through the game. Different gods also give you access to different buildings and myth creatures.

PCPP: You are also looking to make the story more engaging by using segues to more effect, aren't you?

Bruce: That is right. We are using the engine to drive the story forward with in-game cinematics. The original game features 34 scenarios which are linked together and you play all three of the pantheons in the process, changing sides as your character continues in his quest.

PCPP: Sort of like Starcraft?

Bruce: Exactly. Also I have to say using 3D has helped us a lot to

make the story elements more entertaining.

PCPP: So tell us about the main protagonist in the narrative then.

Bruce: The main hero who you identify with in the campaign mode is Arkantos and he will go through the game allying with different pantheons as the game goes on. The story works really well to take you in and out of each of the three pantheons.

PCPP: A singular narrative is definitely more satisfying to play, although much more work for you when you are putting the game together.

Bruce: This is true. The scripting was a lot of work and we had about 40 people on our script committee and it took a lot of revision before we were happy that the script and the design worked well together. The script is 400 to 500 pages long and we are now very proud of it. Yes we also have unique heroes in each age. They are the best unit you can have in a game and often will help you win in quite crucial ways.

PCPP: Can your heroes or even Arkantos die?

Bruce: Yes he can. He falls on the ground and lays there and if you can get your soldiers over to the area where he is, the gods will resurrect him and you can use him to fight for the rest of the mission. Recovered characters will initially be very weak, but they will gain strength over time and before long be able to participate in the scenario you are playing. No matter what, Arkantos will be back for the next mission, but if you can't regain control of an area, you can't revive him (or any other heroes) while the game is being played. This gives you an incentive to fight for your



hero or Arkantos and certainly the game will be harder to win if you leave them on the battlefield.

PCPP: So what if you don't revive them? Have you got some kind of endgame resolution which occurs if you haven't rescued them or have you handled this differently?

Bruce: No, we don't want to punish the player by stopping the game if any of the heroes die. We prefer to have them temporarily taken out of the game than show the player a Game Over screen.

PCPP: Have you investigated the possibility of them having a developmental progression path that the player can control, like an RPG approach? Already having unique units you use from one mission to the next is great because it increases player attachment, but adding skill development over the length of the campaign adds even more attachment. This worked really well in recent RTS games like Battlecry II.

Bruce: We looked at it, but chose not to do anything about it. We'll leave that to Warcraft III as heroes which you can change can add play balance issues. Your heroes do get better as the game progresses though, but it is something the player might not even notice much, let alone be able to change.

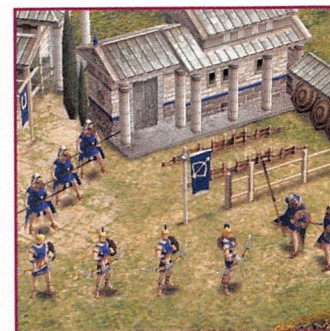
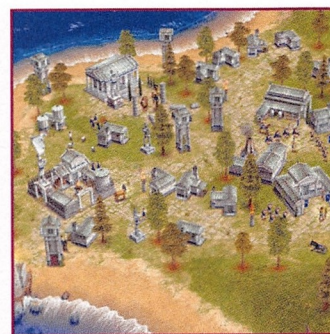
PCPP: Indeed, what about the idea of a more flexible 3D camera you can zoom and rotate?

Bruce: We felt keeping the traditional RTS look made the most sense as we didn't want people to 'play the camera' as well as playing the game. I am happy for other developers to experiment with this stuff, but we would like to stick with what works for the moment.



PCPP: Well 'what works' is certainly something you have managed to produce with almost stunning regularity and we hope you can continue your winning streak, thanks for your time.

Bruce: You are welcome. I am looking forward to coming to Australia soon too, so make sure you say hi.



There is also **FOREST FIRE** which can be great if the enemy has built its base in or very near a forest as it destroys a large area. Destroying the source of wood is also a secondary benefit strategically.

You'll like other powers which are less overt like the **UNDERWORLD PASSAGE** which lets you create instant tunnels which appear in an enemy base so you can feed an army into the tunnel and wreck the enemy camp.

We also had a power called **CEASEFIRE**, but had to remove it because people would build fortresses in an enemy base and then once the ceasefire was over, the forts destroyed the person with the most resources tended to win unfairly. We had to take it out.

LIGHTNING is also really powerful and looks great in the 3D engine, which is why again we are glad we made the effort to go with a real 3D approach.

Enigma: Rising Tide

One of the more popular literary styles of the last decade has been speculative historical fiction. That's to say books written where the author attempts to describe what the world would be like if certain historical events had not happened. "What if" books and the History channel have regularly tackled subjects ranging from what if the Nazis were the first to develop the atomic bomb or what if the Japanese had successfully invaded Australia. Now it's time for the first computer game of this ilk.

Eighteen days after New Year in 1915, Germany unleashed its first Zeppelin raid on Britain and by February 4th the great new German weapon, the U-boat, was blockading Britain. The situation continued to worsen and after two major battles, the landing of the Allies in Gallipoli and the first use of poison gas, Europe was plunged into its first world war.

May 8, 1915

Today the British passenger liner Lusitania reached Liverpool untouched after a frightening encounter with a German U-boat just south of the Irish coast. A steward spotted the periscope's wake off the Lusitania's starboard side, only a little more than two hundred yards away. The U-boat, however, did not take any hostile action and permitted the Lusitania to escape unhindered.

Despite persistent warnings from the Kaiser's government that neutral ships entering British waters risk all the hazards of a war zone, U-boat commanders have heretofore made every reasonable effort to spare innocent lives, in some cases even putting their own crews in serious danger.

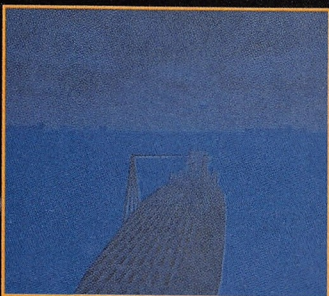
Passengers of the Lusitania reported seeing the U-boat eventually surface several hundred yards behind them where they saw a German officer salute before the submarine dove beneath the waves to continue her deadly mission.

May 24, 1915

After months of intensive negotiation among the governments of Triple Alliance states Italy, Germany, and



This is a boat



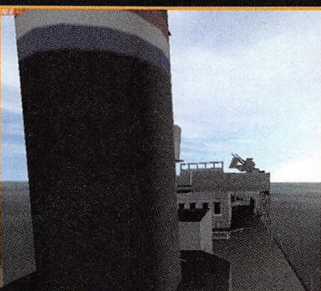
This is a submarine... I think



This is another boat

What really happened - Italy changes side to the Allies

On July 31, 1914, Italy declared its neutrality. The Italian government in the spring of 1915 initiated negotiations with Vienna in an effort to forge an agreement on the lost provinces that would keep Italy in the Triple Alliance with Austria-Hungary. The Germans however, foolishly procrastinated on the territorial decisions which the Italians saw as a refusal and shortly afterwards declared war on their former comrades.

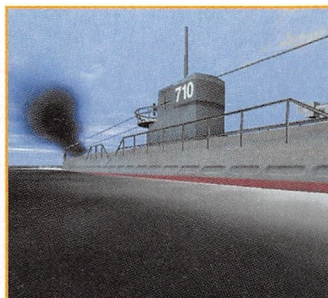


And another...

Developer: Tesseracton ■ Publisher: TBA ■ Distributor: TBA ■ Available: Spring 2003

What really happened - Winston Churchill

Some nine months prior to the Lusitania's sinking, Churchill made an unfortunate comment about the liner being "45,000 tons of live bait". Furthermore, the History Channel has televised a show in which Churchill is claimed to have stated "the more American lives lost, the better" with regard to the Lusitania, apparently in a memorandum written hours before U-20 unleashed its fatal torpedo. It seems certain that Churchill was keenly aware of the propaganda potential should the Germans sink a civilian passenger ship.



And another boat...



Da plane, da plane



Nah-nah-nah, nah-nah, nah-nah ...



... smoke on the water ...

Austria-Hungary, the Italian government announced yesterday it would remain neutral in the escalating European war. Unconfirmed reports suggest England and France courted Italy to join the Allied cause, but that Italy refused after Vienna agreed to return the so-called "lost provinces" to Italian control.

August 22, 1915

An unexpected revelation has cast light on what American pundits and statesmen are calling "the sinister machinations of Whitehall". Yesterday, the American government announced it has come into possession of a note that proves Great Britain's intent to manipulate the United States into

entering the European War.

Lord of the Admiralty Winston Churchill states bluntly that neutral American shipping is to be directed into areas of heavy U-boat activity with neither escort nor warning in hopes that "the more American lives lost the better". His reasoning being that the resulting loss of life would bring America into the war against Germany.

To summarise the rest of Tesseracton's alternate history, Germany wins World War I, the Nazis never come to power and Germany remains an Imperial Monarchy under the Kaiser and dominates Europe. Thus completes the extremely rich and detailed alternate history of Enigma: Rising Tide.

The game

Although a massively multiplayer online game, the term MMORPG isn't necessarily appropriate for this title. Perhaps just MMOG will have to suffice. Essentially, Enigma: Rising Tide is a primarily naval based (aircraft won't make release but are promised to be added in post release patches) game where players can command their own surface ship or submarine. It's sort of like Earth and Beyond in that your main avatar isn't a person, but rather a vehicle where upgrades and progression of level mean better weaponry (for your vehicle) or additional skills that can be used to manoeuvre the vehicle better.

Ships you can own include merchantmen, corvettes, submarines, destroyer-escorts and destroyers. Weapons available for each ship include torpedoes, depth charges, K-guns, deck guns, various machine guns and hedgehogs (anti-submarine weapons - an upgrade to the depth charge).

Within this strange new world of speculative history three new factions now exist. Imperial Germany is now the dominant world power. After a year of unrestricted submarine warfare Britain was deprived of necessary food supplies and war material forcing them to surrender. The German "Weltreich" now controls most of Europe and Africa and is expanding into Asia with U-boats as the backbone of their fighting Navy.

The next faction is the USA who has built a formidable navy and is currently in an expansionist phase, sending troops to the Philippines, Singapore, Morocco, Iceland and Ireland. The US is considered to have the most advanced weapons of all the powers, consisting of aircraft and uber-powerful destroyers.

The League of Free Nations is a fascinating alliance of Imperial Japan and the British Royal Navy in Exile. After their defeat in WWI, the BRNE has moved its headquarters to Hong Kong where it guards the British

Government in Exile and plans the reconquest of Britain. Featuring the fastest ships, the league has a strong grip in Asia and can harass both the Germans in the Atlantic and the Americans in the Pacific.

Graphically, E:RT is looking quite good. Being a naval simulator there's generally only the vast, expansive ocean to stare at but what a lovely ocean it is. The wave generating algorithm is one of the best around, rendering complex and tall rolling waves that toss your ship around the sea. The swells soar and the grey waters loom like mountains that shatter across the riveted warship hulls, resulting in an awesome particle-based sea spray.

By far the best news is that Tesseracton will not be charging a retail fee for its online game. Instead the client will be made fully available from the company's web site to download for free and the only charge is the monthly fee which Tesseracton has said will be competitive in the MMOG market.

Jere Lawrence

What really happened - The Lusitania

On May 7 1915 a German U-20 sub torpedoed the Lusitania and within 15 minutes the ship sank with great loss of life. Over 1198 civilians including many women and young children were swallowed by the waves.

In a satirical effort to point out that the passengers of the Lusitania voluntarily embarked on their journey despite numerous German warnings about sailing into a warzone, Germany made a medal to commemorate the tragedy - a tremendous propaganda blunder (WTF were they thinking??). With continued unrestricted submarine warfare and the loss of American lives on the Lusitania, America was to eventually enter into the war on the side of the Allies.

Tron 2.0

Picture an ancient world.

An ancient, barbaric world. A world without mobile telephones, reliable microwaves, cable television, PDAs, advanced running shoes with the pump-up soles. A world without good inner-city sushi, electronic fuel-injection, Subaru WRXs or, most importantly, the PC. This is 1982. This is the world of TRON.

Back in 1982 computers (or at least the computers worth getting excited about) took up entire rooms and were owned by stick-in-the-mud science faculties who wouldn't even let anyone play Space War on them. Disney, bored with cavorting anthropomorphised animals and still the best part of a decade away

from the triumph that was Atlantis, put its corporate finger on the pulse of a generation and commissioned TRON.

The reality of the film is this: every computer program we ever write is actually a little man in a special suit that fluoresces under UV-light, kind of like your new sneakers in a club or, in the language of 1982, discotheque. These programs all live together in the world of the computer, and must act according to the whims of the Master Control Program. An hour and a half of early-80s digital effects later and Jeff Bridges has been zapped into the computer by a special laser, has won at all the games he originally designed, defeated the Master Control

Program, locked lips with a female computer program (go figure), got drunk on pure electricity and generally had a pretty fine time of it.

Digital kitsch

So a world in which living computer programs compete with each other on giant fluorescing playfields and race cool lightcycles on grids of death seems pretty ripe territory for an actual game. Enter Monolith, the developer responsible for the still engaging No One Lives Forever, to do for the kitschy 80s ideal of a computerised world what they did for kitschy spy films.

TRON 2.0 - which for the moment is being developed completely independently of the upcoming film of the same name - will be part adventure, part FPS and part third person action game. There will be an overarching narrative, involving both 'classic era' TRON and the



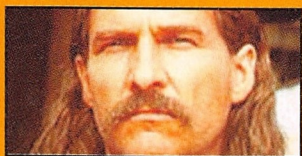
Kapow! Blaow, fffshhhzzz Pow!

new, uplinked downloaded Internet future of TRON, punctuated by set-piece sub-games, such as the lightcycle race or the disc challenge.

Which brings us to weaponry. Coverage of TRON 2.0 in other media outlets has made a big deal about the disc, which will be the basic weapon in the game. Cult followers of the film will recall how this disc had numerous functions in the world of TRON, including allowing one of Jeff Bridges' companion programs to contact his User. There was also the

We love Jeff

Is too much Jeff Bridges barely enough? Do you really need to know that his first film was The Company She Keeps (1950) in which he claims to have played an uncredited infant? Are you, indeed, a Lloyd Bridges fan and want to check out rare photographs of the whole Bridges acting dynasty? Then log on to www.jeffbridges.com. Or, for a slightly creepier experience, try www.mgmua.com/wildbill. The site is badly designed, but it is Wild Bill and for some reason Jeff Bridges as a Wild West bad boy just creeps the hell out of me.



Developer: Monolith ■ Publisher: Disney Interactive ■ Distributor: TBA ■ Available: Christmas

memorable sequence where Jeff actually fought a human (using an arcade machine) in the disc combat game he had himself invented. Each player stood at the centre of a series of concentric circles, one player threw his disc at the other and if the receiving player dropped the disc, whichever circle it hit would disappear, replaced by a chasm of ultimate doom. So the game goes back and forth until one player eventually falls to his death.

While TRON 2.0 will include this sub-game, the disc will also have other functions, and like the basic weapon in games such as Unreal, it can be upgraded into an explosive, shrapnel-hurling device, a user-guided missile and of course that mainstay of gaming, a heat-seeker, although it will presumably hunt something

Yes no can you repeat the question?

Arguably the most endearing character in the film was Cursor, the little bit who Jeff Bridges befriends, if only temporarily. After Cursor answers the first half dozen of Jeff's questions with a simple "yes", Jeff asks, "Is 'yes' all you can say?" to which Cursor replies, "No." This is of course because Cursor has only an on or off state, like a binary digit. Cursor and his friends will return for the game, but will perform some interesting functions. Like buttons or switches, bits can be activated to allow access to different parts of the world. However, they are not always located near the door they open, and when activated they will immediately zoom off toward the object they relate to, with the player in hot pursuit. Presumably this is supposed to represent such things as a hard drive retrieving data, based on an entry in its file allocation table.

other than actual heat, given this is a digital world.

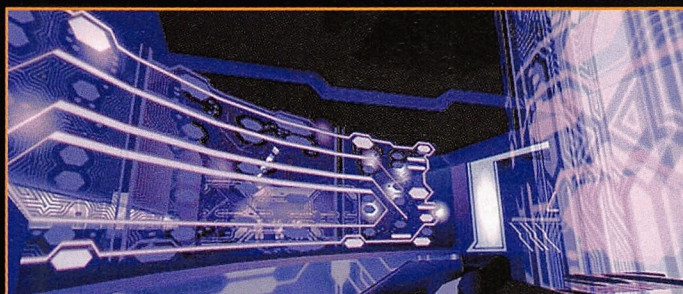
133+ hax0rz

As mentioned earlier, TRON 2.0 will also incorporate concepts that we modern PC users will find familiar. For instance, one of the levels demonstrated at E3 was the Firewall. The player must defeat the security systems here in order to progress deeper into the world. The sense of scale is extremely impressive; the Firewall is represented as a series of giant spinning hoops which must be lined up in order to unlock the access port.

Like in the film, the world is in the grip of a 'bad' computer program, and the environments and programs under its control are coloured red (because red is 'bad' - better dead than red, folks). This naturally made for some very effective imagery in the film, especially when Jeff Bridges' 'good' program swept the red away with lines of shining blue. Likewise, evil security drones in the game will be represented by hollow suits of red-lit armour, red piping on the walls will denote enemy territory, and the boss monsters and NPCs will no doubt shoot red fire at the player. Simple imagery is effective imagery and you just don't get much more effective than TRON.

While TRON 2.0 by its very concept risks falling into the great bin of novelty games like Sentinel and that thing with the giant floating islands that shot at each other (You're thinking of Stratosphere: Conquest of the Skies - Ed), the strength of Monolith and the track records of both the developer and the film itself should result in a tasty alternative in an endless parade of WW2-flavoured shooters. Prepare for uploading by Christmas.

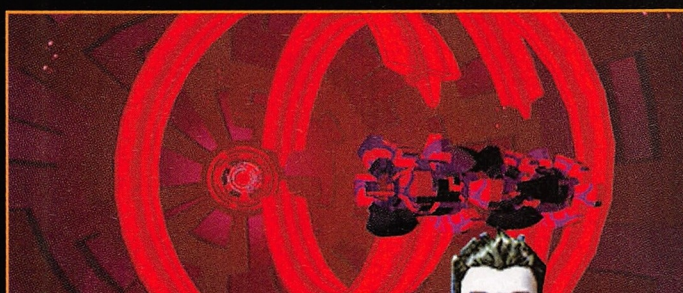
Anthony Fordham



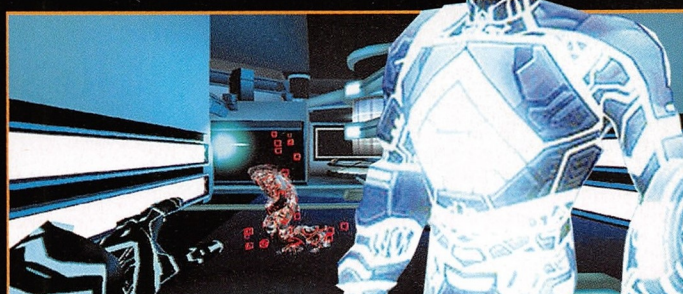
While all the other kids were playing Pac-Man...



"Cool, my Dunlops are fluorescing."



Red equals bad

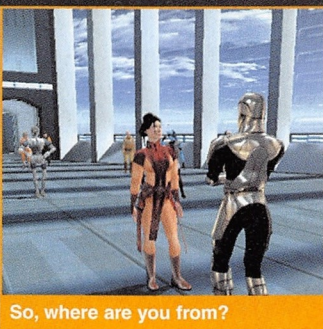
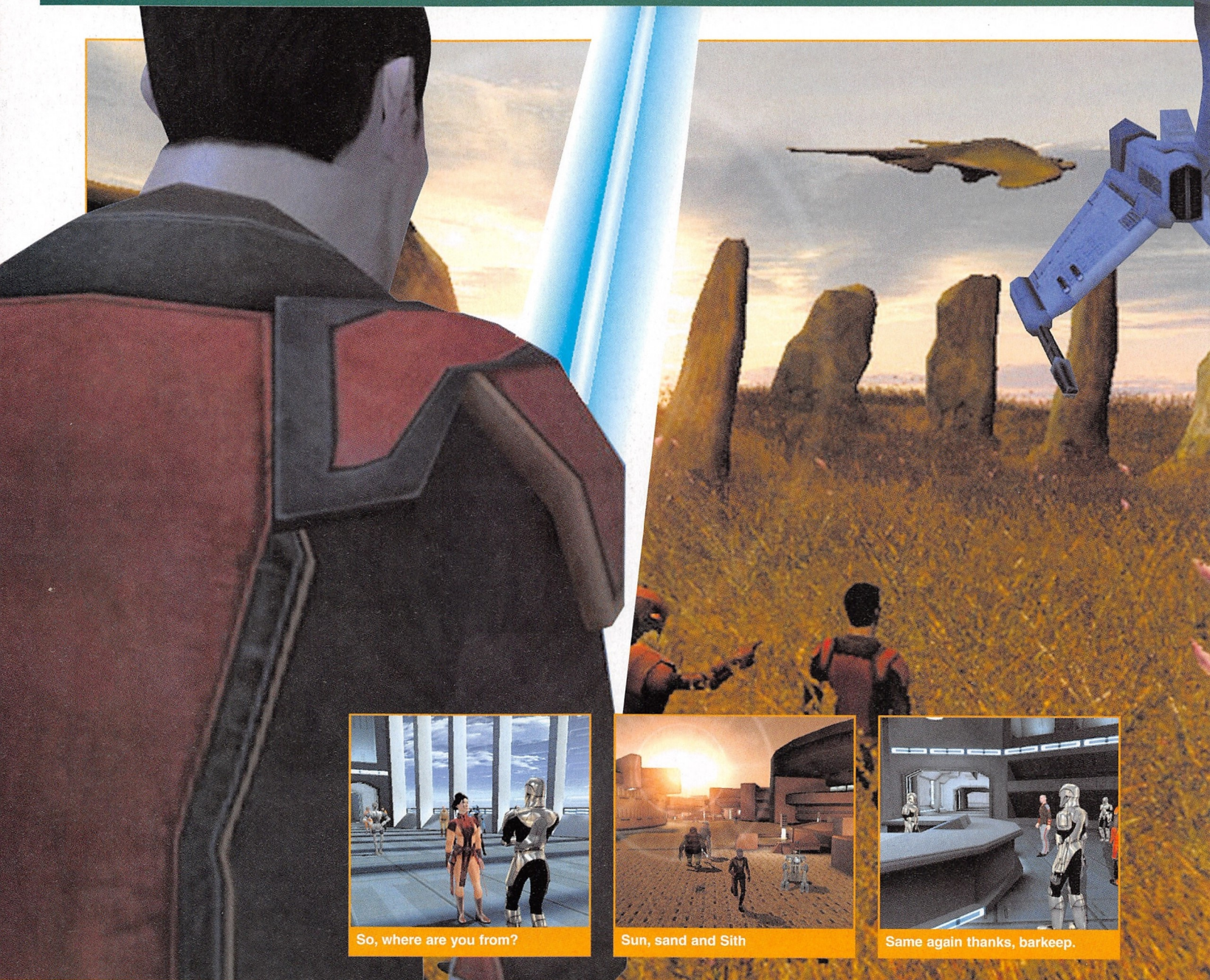


I'm gonna delete you so bad...

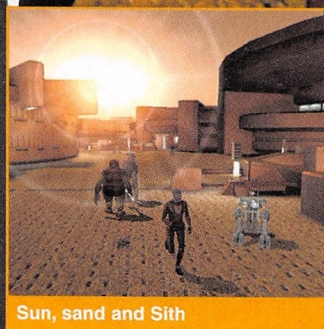


Chicks dig neon

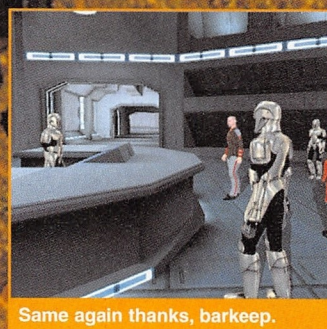
Star Wars : Knights of the Old Republic



So, where are you from?



Sun, sand and Sith



Same again thanks, barkeep.

Local Jedi Knights have been known to sneak up behind wandering tourists and give them the old "Light Saber Jacksie Brand" for their own amusement.

Long before the Empire and 4000 years before Episode IV, SW:KOTOR takes you into the Golden Age of the Republic when the Jedi and the Sith numbered in their thousands. With the Galaxy reeling from a recent conflict with the Dark Lords, the ongoing battle between the Jedi and the Sith rages on. Your actions in this highly anticipated RPG determine the outcome of this colossal galactic war - and your destiny as a Jedi.

Utilising Bioware's new Odyssey

engine, an upgrade to the Neverwinter Nights engine, KOTOR features all the latest DX8.1 abilities such as bump mapping, environment mapping and vertex shading, making it even more graphically impressive than NWN. Some environments in particular are absolutely stunning and rival the kinds of zones seen in MMORPGs. The sun (or suns, depending on your location) rise from the horizon and cast a delightful golden glow across the landscape. The thick,


lush sprite-based grass waves realistically in the wind and the character models have a high poly count and look great. Actually, MMORPGs seem to have influenced the development of KOTOR in more than just the graphics.

Wookies with MadSk1llz

The character progression system is skills-based and as you level up you're given points that can be used to increase any of the numerous combat and RPG skills.

If you preferred using a ranged weapon over a lightsaber then it's simply a matter of increasing the ranged weapons skill. Like Jedi Knight (all of them) force powers play an important role and you can choose which ones you wish to raise along with the skills. New force powers can be learnt at a high cost, or old established powers can be raised instead. Each choice you make affects your inclination towards the Light or Dark side of the force.

Developer: Tesseracton ■ Publisher: Lucas Arts ■ Distributor: EA ■ Available: Spring 2003



Upon starting the game you choose your character's gender and enter the world. Although you are required to play as a human, the rest of your party can consist of wookies, battle droids, Twi'lek, humans and more. Your party however, can only consist of three characters at one time but extra characters can be stored on your starship so that your party can be strategically formed based on whatever challenge you are currently undertaking.

Despite the three-character limit Bioware is promising that you will be able to take part in epic, large-scale battles between the Jedi and Sith. Exact numbers haven't been given but we're told to expect some truly eyeball-exploding action that fuels the game's main conflict.

Within the KOTOR universe there are approximately eight worlds that you can visit. Some are famous like Tatooine, while others are brand new like the sprawling city of Teris (no, not Tetris). One situation on Teris demoed by Lucasarts featured Imperial battle droids plus friends invading while a group of Jedi Knights ran

amok with lightsabers trying to defend the city. For an RPG, this is a really exciting addition to the genre - the chance to actually take part in large Star Wars-esque battles. Graphically the battle was amazing not merely because of the number of NPCs, but also in the level of detail just in the humans. Animations were very thorough and ranged from eyebrow movements and the ruffling of hair to the displaying of emotions such as fear and pain.

Interactive cut scenes

Another interesting departure from the standard RPG is with Bioware's addition of action-packed minigames that take the role of interactive cut scenes. Non-twitch gamers shouldn't be concerned though. Bioware have stated that the minigames are meant as a reward at the end of a certain section of gameplay rather than a twitchy arcade style showstopper that would frustrate the "madskillz" impaired. One such minigame demoed by Lucasarts was from the turret section of your starship the Ebon Hawk. The interactive cut scene had you blasting at enemies in a style quite reminiscent of the famous Episode IV Millennium Falcon scene.

That's one damn fast suitcase

Your ship however is more than just a means of travelling from planet to planet as it serves as a type of giant suitcase, or mobile bank. In your ship you can store additional allies that join and leave your party based on your requirement of their skills and there's also plenty of storage for placing all your "über-phat-loot".

Combat is handled extremely well with standard combat-blocking

and thrusting based on RPG skills calculations as to whether you hit or miss your target. To keep combat more interesting there are numerous skills and force powers that can be used tactically. Some skills are activated based on combat situations such as being able to make a counter attack off a parry or using available "mana/force power" to attack faster or perform stunningly well animated Jedi style super attacks. Bioware have definitely worked hard to ensure that combat does not get samey and dull.

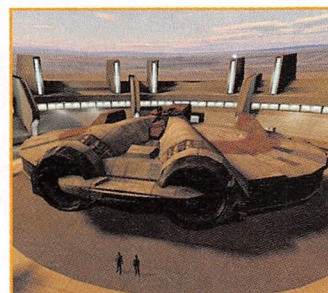
We're number 2, we're number 2 - WTF?

There is some bad news though. Due to the release of Neverwinter Nights this year, Bioware has decided to delay the release of the PC version until the middle of next year. This is to ensure that Bioware doesn't damage NWN sales by "competing" with itself. Instead, the Xbox version will be released first with Bioware stating that the PC product should be superior still to make up for having to be second.

Jere Lawrence



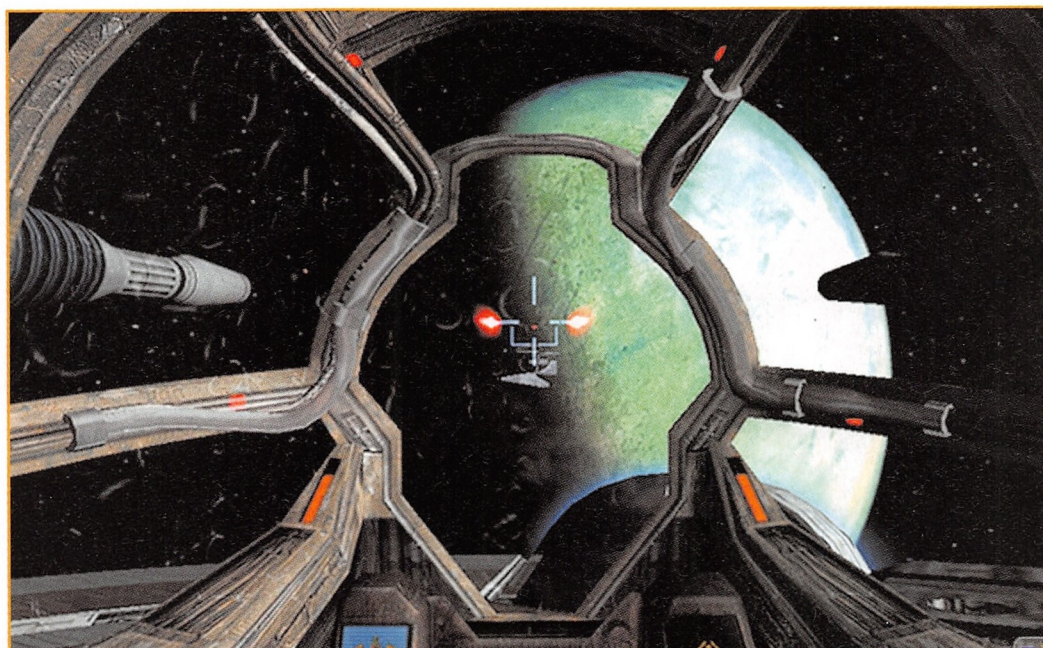
There's something on your... oh.



You won't lose it in a carpark



Look, it's not you, it's me...

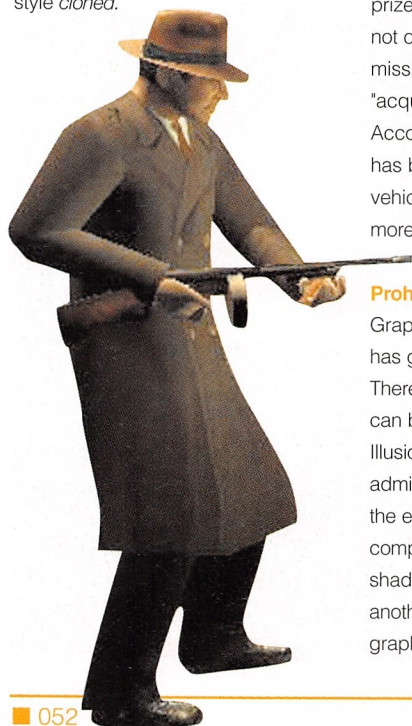


Obliterate that ship in front of you, slowly reverse into a three-point turn and you've finished your exam.

Mafia



Given the popularity of anti-social games in this day and age, it would seem that in a commercially over-glorified kind of way, crime does pay. With the past popularity of the Grand Theft Auto series on console and the recent chart-busting GTA3 for PC it would appear there's a gamer obsession with what happens when angry thugs get their hands on automatic weapons. Mafia: The City of Lost Heaven is an action game from Czech studio Illusion Softworks that takes place in a huge American city in the 1930s - a time when warring crime syndicates and corrupt police put the "mean" into "Mean Streets". Oh look, another gameplay style cloned.



Presenting more than a co-incidental similarity to GTA3, Mafia is also a thirdperson action game in which you have freedom of movement within a city where different missions can be accepted and completed to progress through the game. You play as Tommy, a lowly cabbie who is made an "offer he can't refuse" (had to get it in somewhere didn't I?) to join the Salieri family, a wealthy and powerful group with a lot of inner-city influence and bad blood between them and the Morello family. Missions within the town range from sneaking into guarded buildings and assassinating key characters, cracking safes or even stealing a prized racing car. Surprise, surprise, not only can you take to your missions on foot but you can also "acquire" cars to get around in. According to the developers, care has been made to balance foot and vehicular travel to keep gameplay more varied.

Prohibition free visuals

Graphically, a lot of care and effort has gone into the visuals of Mafia. There's a definite romanticism that can be attached to the 30s and Illusion Softworks has done an admirable job in capturing the look of the era. Besides being a DX8.1 compliant game (i.e. vertex and pixel shader support), atmosphere is another impressive aspect of the graphics. On a dark and stormy



Tommy the cabbie - sold his soul for a Salieri salary



Wait, I left my umbrella on the back seat...

night, sheet lightning illuminates the surrounding clouds and muzzle flashes on guns flare out into the darkness. In one particularly impressive scene, a gang war inside an old garage involved a spectacular fire-fight with rapid-firing tommy guns

that, with each shot, illuminated the area in lush golden-yellow muzzle flashes. The more firing, the more lighting - hooray for vertex shaders!

As you can see from the screenshots, the streets, alleys and buildings feature some extremely

Developer: Illusion Softworks ■ Publisher: GodGames ■ Distributor: THQ ■ Available: 2002

high resolution, highly detailed and well coloured textures that, although not quite photo-realistic, display the kind of semi-realism that we've come to expect from graphics post 2000. Other nice touches include fully lip-synced facial animation and very detailed vertex shader assisted motion-captured animation.

The level of detail in the cars is also particularly noteworthy. Of the 60 vehicles currently available, each and every one is modelled and rendered extremely accurately and comes complete with reflective surfaces (environment mapping) on the chassis and working headlights. Cars can also be damaged with windows able to be shot out, bumpers torn clean off and car frames that can be peppered with bullet holes, have their wheels flattened or even wrenched off. Available vehicles include roadsters, taxi cabs, race cars and hijackable police vehicles.

Are you talking to me? Are you talking to me?

Mafia's sonics are also equally as good as its visuals with an abundance of ambient sounds that range from ragtime and swing music heard on radios around the city or even from live bands in some of the many nightclubs. Chatter from the city's inhabitants creates the background hubbub of a big city and the in-game characters' voices thankfully aren't overly cheesy.

You dirty rat - the wanted meter

To keep the game moving, the cops in Mafia have been bribed not to lock you up and throw away the key, but they will apprehend you and cause you to fail your mission if your wanted level gets too high. Activities that can increase your wanted level include speeding, running red lights or running over pedestrians. The only requirement to reducing the wanted level is if you can get away from the police and stay away. The longer the heat is off, the more your wanted level

goes down. Also similar to GTA3 is a garage where you can park the various stolen cars although in Mafia you can amass a huge stable of different vehicles. For those that prefer high speed action, the city's speed limit can be set from the options, allowing for less interrupted play.

A thug on a mission

The developers have recently promised that there will be plenty of missions and variety in how they're completed. Some involve stealth where a run in with guns blazing approach simply won't work and you're also required to carry out sniper style assassinations, gang war gunfights and some surprise tasks that Illusion Softworks is yet to divulge.

Weapon accuracy is reported to be historically correct and modelled after real-world counterparts but without their flaws (tommy guns were renowned for jamming) to keep the game's pace moving. Weapons include the Smith & Wesson Colt .45, shotguns with knock-back, the infamous tommy gun as well as baseball bats, crowbars and knives for those quieter times of enemy dispatching (hmm, tasteful.....).

For fans of the GTA games (and there's a lot of you out there) Mafia will fulfil any remaining desires that GTA3 was unable to placate with some very nice visuals, sonics and bloodthirsty anti-social behaviour. Now before you all start complaining about my obvious cynicism regarding this title, let's face it, this game could have just as easily been a modern day Untouchables but it seems being a thug is in vogue at the moment. Still, despite certain media outlets telling us that interactivity is worse than passive spectating, this game is certainly not as cruelly violent as movies such as Goodfellas or The Godfather.

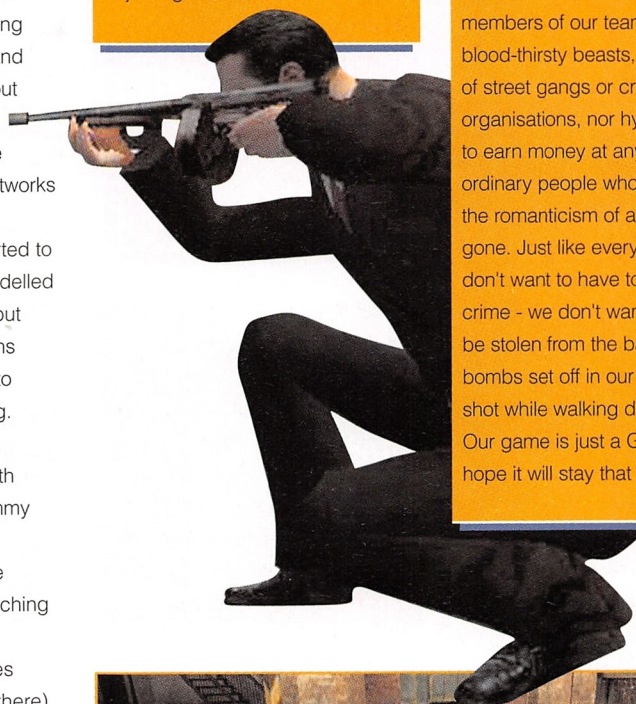
Jere Lawrence

Allegation: Game is teaching the Italian youth how to join the Mafia

Italy's President of the national anti-mafia police department Roberto Centaro has told the *Il Giornale* newspaper that he would do anything to prevent the sale of Mafia in Italy, especially since the Italians are under the impression that Mafia is an interactive guide to joining the Mafia.

Defense: Is not

Illusion Softworks' response to this is: "Our game is a return to the already rather romanticised thirties with its glamorous architecture, beautiful cars and charming music. In the story of the main hero, effort was made to try and not glorify violence, and we definitely do not show that the toughest, most aggressive person will always be the winner. I and the other members of our team are not blood-thirsty beasts, nor members of street gangs or criminal organisations, nor hypocrites trying to earn money at any cost. We are ordinary people who have fallen for the romanticism of a time long gone. Just like everyone else, we don't want to have to worry about crime - we don't want our money to be stolen from the bank, to have bombs set off in our cars, or be shot while walking down the street. Our game is just a GAME and we hope it will stay that way."



Dodgy Ford piece of crap!



Street Rod 3

Developer: Auxiliary Software ■ Publisher: Auxiliary Software ■ Distributor: Online ■ Available: TBA

Anyone who frequents the PCPP forums will be aware that there is one topic which predictably and routinely resurfaces: "How do I get a job making computer games?" Well, sit back and take notes folks. While he's not just sitting around quaffing beer with his mates, Street Rod 3 lead programmer and no doubt soon-to-be professional games developer, Jason Boettcher, is letting his keyboard do the talking (as he quaffs beer with his mates).

Don't drink and drive, bub

Many of the more mature gamers out there will surely be nursing fond memories of the classic Street Rod games that were released for the PC, Amiga and Commodore 64 way back when the world was very young. For the llama noobs out there, the game basically consisted of buying, modifying and hotting-up classic American muscle cars. Once you've earned enough dough to build your ideal dream machine, it's time to challenge The King in order to decide who's really the biggest petrolhead in town.

Boettcher and fellow Auxiliary Software honcho Alan Blackwell, working with a team of between five and 10 (depending on how close end of semester exams are) other keen amateur game developers, are showcasing their skills by bringing the bygone age of PC street rodding back to your home, free of charge, bigger and better than ever.

Let's hit it!

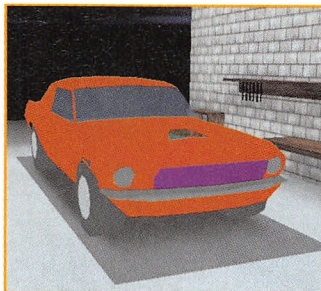
Street Rod 3 is a community project and Auxiliary Software is constantly on the look-out for anyone keen to dig in and lend a helping hand. Boettcher is particularly interested in hearing from any budding 3D modellers in order to produce cars, tracks and scenes. You want to get your foot in the door? Well here's your chance to get something on that resume! Auxiliary Software can be contacted through the game's web site at www.streetrod3.com, where you can also log on to the Street Rod 3 Forums in order to make suggestions and discuss the title with other gamers and developers.



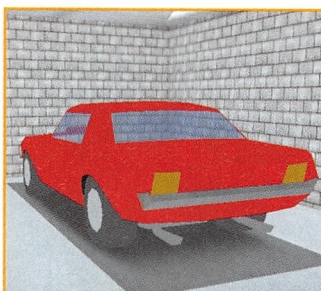
They work best inside the car

You can't tune that mess, klutz

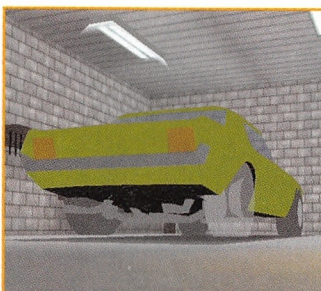
Apart from updated 3D graphics and sound effects, Street Rod 3 is going to stick very closely to the original game model from all those years ago. You'll start the game as a hip young dude, fresh out of high school



She's a beaut ain't she?



Hey, someone stole all my tools!



My cat's under there somewhere

in the summer of '72. Having worked all summer "lugging boxes in Bargain City", you've saved up a few hundred bucks and can afford to buy a cheap heap from the US equivalent of the Trading Post. From there, it's your job to win illegal street races, thus

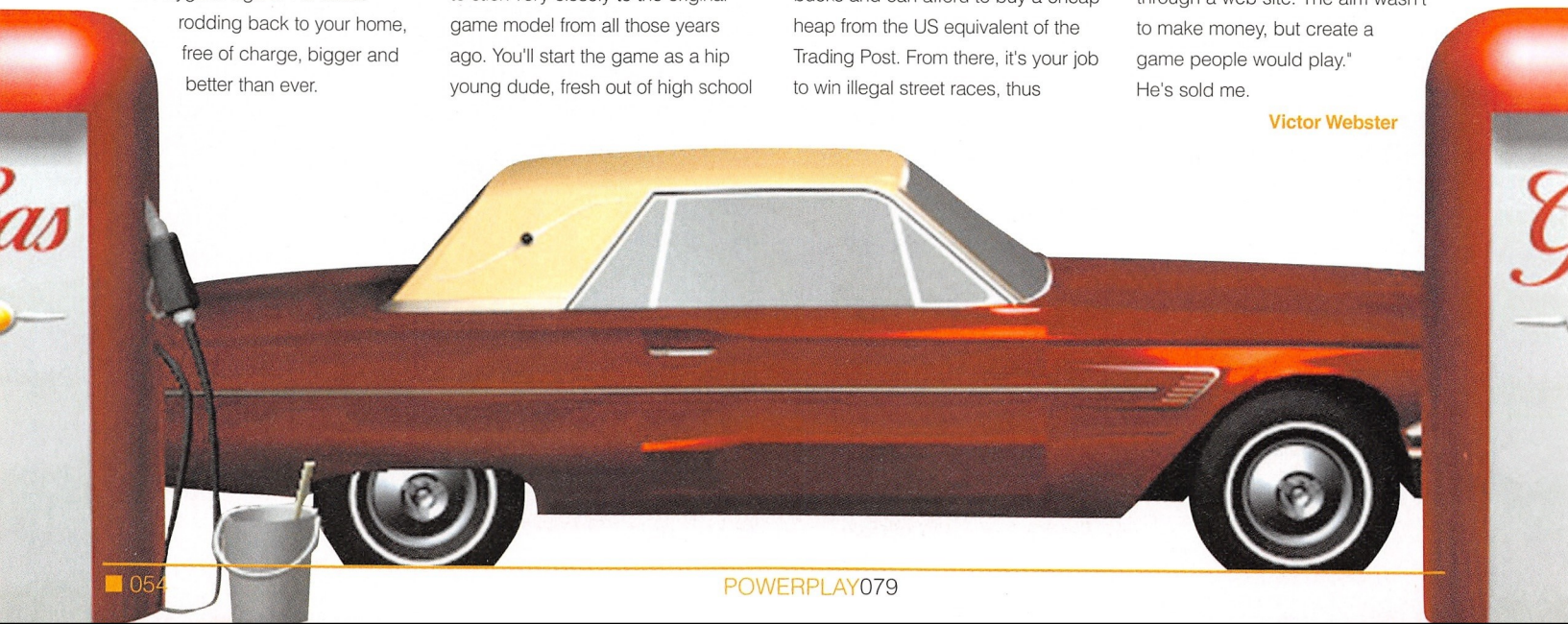
winning and saving up enough cash to supe up your ride, buy new cars and pay for your gas. If this sounds familiar, remember that it was the Street Rod series that first used this innovative and fun system of car modification - Gran Turismo, Motor City Online and others only modernised it.

The lads at Auxiliary Software are planning on a whole host of cars for the final version, many of them making a return from the old classics. Of course, the most modern car will be of 1972 vintage, but the oldest could be from just about any time period. "Cars will get added during the development of the game," says Boettcher. "Having said that, it's hard to give descriptions of what cars will be made for the game." Boettcher also hinted at the possibility of a separate Aussie-mod after the release of the finished product (Presumably with a "Tell him he's dreaming!" sound byte in the Trading Post module - Ed).

Greased lightning!

The final version of Street Rod 3 will support multiplayer gaming through the Internet and the best news is that it's all free! Boettcher explains, "The game is free mainly because I wanted people to play it. Not many people would pay money for a game made by amateur developers through a web site. The aim wasn't to make money, but create a game people would play." He's sold me.

Victor Webster



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WWE Raw

Developer: Anchor Inc ■ Publisher: THQ ■ Distributor: THQ ■ Available: 2003

It's the ultimate test of bravery, the toughest, meanest event ever. If you want to prove your manhood in American sports entertainment, there's only one way to do it and that's by rolling around on a big mat with buff, waxed and sweaty, tights-wearing men with names like Too Hotty, Perry Saturn or Bah Bah Ray. Despite the wisecracks, WWE is pure sports entertainment and it draws crowds as big as football grand finals and that's only to the regular, weekly shows.

Veteran wrestling game publisher, THQ, has teamed up with the much vaunted Japanese development team, Anchor Inc, to create WWE Raw. The title was originally written for the Xbox - the PC version is a modified port (we always suspected that console would turn out to be good for something).

Prepare to meet Vic Victorioso!

WWE Raw will feature an incredibly detailed 'create-a-superstar' option, which allows you to completely create your own unique wrestlers or even put yourself into the game (at last that stupid nickname my rugby team gave me will prove of some value). There are thousands of different combinations of clothing and accessories that will ensure that every wrestler you make will be totally diverse. Not only can you choose different outfits, but you can also manipulate your wrestler's body shape, height, mannerisms and moves. Not only that, but the ability to create a custom

'ring entrance' is also featured (Why... no, no I promised I wouldn't - Ed). Rest assured, if you plan on kicking someone's butt, they're going to know about it in advance.

Unfortunately, WWE Raw will not feature cage matches, which have become commonplace in modern wrestling games (not to mention some older ones). Despite the lack of cage matches, there is a good variety of other game modes available. Included are one-on-one exhibitions, two-on-two, tag team, Triple Threat, two-on-one handicap, three-on-one handicap, fatal-four-way, and the ever present Battle Royal (I'm finding it REALLY HARD to control myself! - Ed). Hardcore wrestling fans will notice that a cage match is not the only missing game mode, as an I Surrender type match (where you have to win by forcing your opponent to quit) is also evidently lacking.

Could it be realistic?

The fighting system in WWE Raw will be something special. Not only will you have to beat the bejesus out of your opponent, you'll have to impress the crowd while doing so. It's damn hard to pin your opponent if the crowd are going crazy for him or her. Needless to say, this gives popular wrestlers such as the Rock and Stone Cold (who's recently left the industry) an immediate advantage. Ironically, it also brings a certain amount of realism into a game that simulates an unrealistic sport! After all, how often do you see the Rock - with the crowd fanatically cheering him on in the



Oh God, no, not my belly button, please!

background - beaten and fairly pinned by an unpopular wrestler!? Just like real-life, in WWE Raw you might have to resort to smacking him over the head with a chair in order to get him to stay down.

It's good to see a wrestling title - at last - make its way back to the PC after all this time. Hopefully this will be the first of many, and computerised wrestling will no longer exist solely in the domain of the console.

Victor Webster



A yen for wrestling

Japanese developers have always been the best when it comes to wrestling games due to their incredible amount of experience with the genre. This can be witnessed through past success. You can check out about a zillion Japanese wrestling games for various older platforms by having a sneak around countless emulation sites (such as www.classicgaming.com, www.zophar.net or www.fireproclub.com). These sites not only give interesting insight into the history and evolution of wrestling games (not to mention gaming in general), but you'll also get to relive those nostalgic old memories... for free!



Dude, is this the Korn concert?



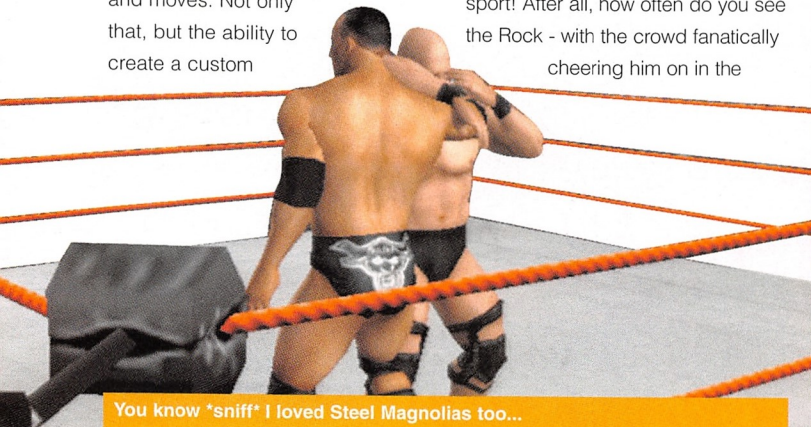
Height: 189 cm Weight: 110k IQ: 3



Oww, my pancreas...

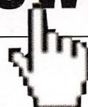


Forbidden wrestling love

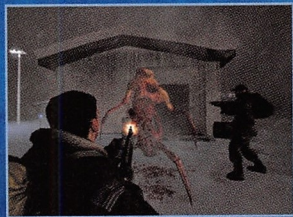


You know *sniff* I loved Steel Magnolias too...

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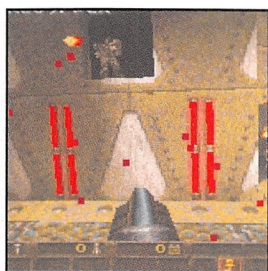
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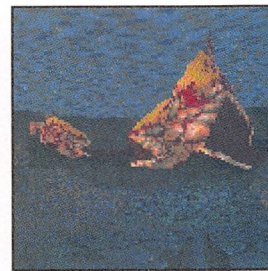
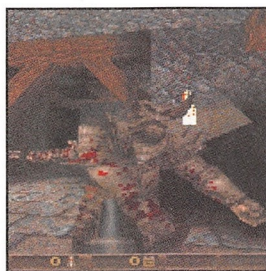
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AUT



HOR! AUTHOR!



The quest for the games writer

We all know that in certain genres, a game with a better story will prove more engaging than one with nothing but a bunch of flashy graphics. But who writes these stories? Who is responsible for creating the characters we love, the situations we laugh at and the memorable moments we share with our friends? **Timothy C Best** does some digging to find out.

For a while the games world fell in love with the new adventures of 3D. Who hasn't been wowed by pretty worlds and reflecting light? Who hasn't bought the farm, at least once because they were checking out the dancing cows?

We'll never tire of pretty. Think about movies. Just because we are used to special effects doesn't mean that we don't want to see them. On the other hand, when special effects are all that there is, the effect is usually quite far from special. Anyone else more than a little disappointed with *Alien Resurrection* or *The One*? (Hey, I liked those movies - Ed)

The same goes for games. Once the brilliant flashing lights melt into the world, all you are left with is gameplay and the tale that's being spun.

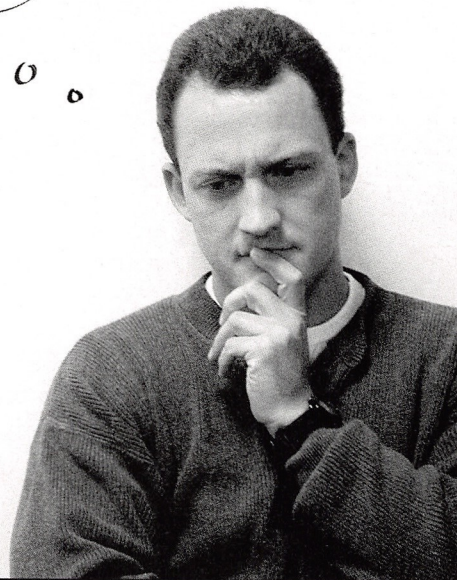
Sometimes this tale is a gateway to the Hell of a Thousand Frustrations. This hell seems specially wrought by chimps chained to typewriters. Since the game looks good you know the graphics department got human workers but the woeful plot makes you want to call the RSPCA.

Gaming nirvana comes when everything merges into a zen-like oneness; game design, gameplay and story become indistinguishable. What you're doing and where you're doing it both make sense and the controls become instinctive.

Even when you come across one of these magical games, chances are you'll miss the tiny little credit that acknowledges the writer. For a novel to be written by Stephen King is a selling point in itself and while the actual writer of a movie is often sidelined, something that has been penned by Cameron Crowe or Tarantino will plaster this fact all over the poster. On the other hand, name one famous games writer. You can name some programmers and probably even level designers but who writes the story behind the code? Why aren't they getting the praise or flaming hatred they deserve?

To find these missing persons I put on my detective hat and Bogart accent and after running wild through the streets for months, I finally found two insiders who were willing to spill the beans.

One writes the games and has his name attached to such titles as *Fallout 1 and 2*, *Planescape: Torment* and *Icwind Dale*. The other was the Director of Development at LucasArts and oversaw such hits as *Dark Forces*, *Grim Fandango* and the *Monkey Island* series and now heads EA Asia Pacific. There are a million stories in the big city; this is one about the people who write them.



Who writes the games?

Chris Avellone Senior Designer at Black Isle

We don't have any one writer responsible for the whole game; the whole team combines to create the story. Torment and the Fallouts were collaborations between many people, designers, artists, programmers and producers.

What generally happens is one or two people write the overall story skeleton and no matter how finished or squeaky clean it may seem at the time, this is actually the first draft - it will end up getting huge holes punched through it and then dismembered and rebuilt as the areas are laid out and dialogue is written.

Once the story skeleton is in place and ready to be fleshed out, sections of the narrative are divided up amongst the designers (usually by area - for example, "Chris, you design X, Y, Z areas. Dave, you design A, B, C," and so on).

Multiple designers will

often help out with a single location, too, along with help from the artists and programmers - most of the locations in Black Isle games would have been a lot less interesting without the programmers playing around with AI, battle tactics and intricate plot seeds.

Sometimes they even consult us before they do these things - other times they leave them as landmines for us to discover while testing. Artists add a lot of flavour to the levels, too, and they'll usually put in cool scenery items or create an atmosphere for the location that you build upon even further to keep the narrative fires burning.

As for [maintaining high] quality, well, you can pretty much blame the fans and their torch-wielding hatred. They tend to demand a lot from an RPG, so we've had to raise the bar to make the stories and dialogues interesting.

Story by committee

Many, many great games with awesome plots have been written this way including System Shock, Half-Life, Sam & Max, Grim Fandango, StarCraft and Deus Ex.

In fact, pretty much all the big games come out of collaboration like this, which is interesting since movies tend to come one step closer to direct-to-video with every script revision.

In movies there are locations which need to be arranged months in advance, catering and super-ego method actors. Furthermore, making things up as you go along leads to re-shoots, scenes filmed 'just in case' and subplots and foreshadowing that points to things on the editing room lino. All of these things cost time and thousands of dollars worth of film.

For games, on the other hand, it makes a lot of sense to write as you go along in a continuous collaborative mode. New plot twists or characters might have to be added or removed as technical limitations come into play or as an AI system works better than expected.

A great level design may necessitate a new plot element to entice players into it or to give them a reason to stick to level design parameters.

An example of this came in the development of Red Faction. Since you could blast through walls and tunnel through the Earth, the plot had to be used to keep characters on track and prevent them from just carving short cuts through levels.

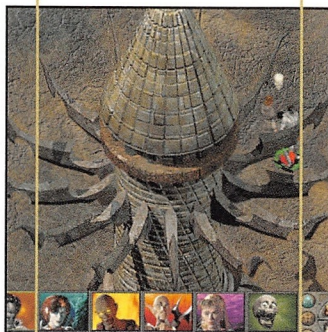
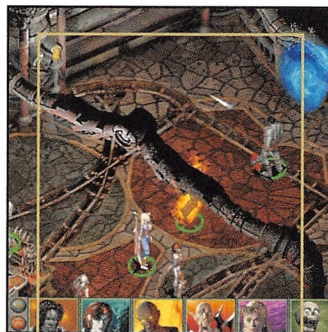
Unfortunately, when even the plot didn't work, Volition implemented the now famous indestructible office partitions that could withstand direct rocket blasts, unlike the million-year-old granite in the tunnel outside.

So let's just say that games will always be collaborative efforts between the whole team. Even if that's the case, it doesn't mean professional writers from other media don't have anything to contribute.

Some games have gone beyond the cheap cash-in of a licensed property to use the vision of a writer to craft a world. Just look at Tom Clancy's Rainbow

Six or Raymond E. Feist's Betrayal at Krondor.

As game budgets go up and the medium becomes more integrated into everyday society it won't just be writers with an eye to the future who jump on the bandwagon. I'd be very surprised if we didn't see people with star-power and transferable skills move into the games world. How long until we see the FPS White Dove by John Woo? Even with his skills, would the game be any good? Is the only reason Tarantino hasn't written a game simply that he's never been invited to?



Who to choose?

Steve Dauterman Head of EA Asia Pacific

SD: Great games are usually a result of a great world that has been created in the first place that gamers want to explore. If a writer can create a great world, then you have better odds for making a great game.

If I were starting from scratch, I'd be seeking out writers who have the ability to create these worlds. You would also want someone who can write dialogue to fit the tone of the game (drama, comedy, action, etc).

Beyond that, I think technical knowledge isn't as important as a strong understanding of the nature of games and how they differ in discipline to books or film.

We are working with Harry Potter in our UK studio where we have the rights to what have been the best selling books over the past several years. It reinforces the idea that when a world is created by a writer it gives game designers so many options to work with.

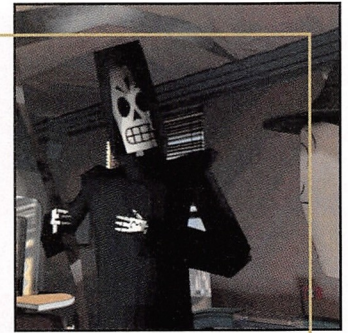
However, as we specialise, one of the downsides for the

industry right now is that we seem to be missing visionary game designers who have the roots of great gameplay combined with a vision for storytelling. A lot of those game designers were created because they have practised in the art of writing, design, gameplay mechanics, art, programming, etc.

TCB: So, if a writer like Joss Whedon, Stephen King or Kevin Smith (more for his comic work) came to you wanting to write a whole game, would you use them?

SD: Absolutely. But they have to be conscious of how their linear writing style needs to complement the non-linear nature of games.

We need to tell stories in games, but we need to do them with different pacing than books or movies. We have and currently do employ writers with Hollywood credentials and they are great at helping us shape stories in the classic sense and adding solid dialogue as well.



A maturing industry

It would seem the choice of who writes the games is slowly and subtly changing. As the game industry matures and higher production values are demanded for blockbuster titles, we should see more writers "with Hollywood credentials" being hired by game companies.

Even so, these writers are never likely to pen an entire game. You could have a full-time writer at every studio but, in most cases, the narrative takes a lot less time to write than it does to

the spoken word up to the quality of the story being told.

Moves like this make sense. As games budgets increase and our hobby becomes a recognised mainstream art form, punters will expect writing on par with the best Hollywood movies (BWAHAHAHA! - Ed). That will require a change in how things are done.

Last year, Rage Software pre-empted this when it harnessed the talents of one of the edgiest and most awarded writers of the graphic novel world by hiring



As game budgets increase, punters will expect writing on par with the best Hollywood movies

program. Every object has to be created and every action coded, so it makes sense to double up on jobs for your writer. That way, when they're not needed for story, they can be designing levels or tweaking the interface layout. This approach also means that your writers are well aware of the medium they are working in and helps people see the forest for the trees.

That's not to say that writing is always left to people more fluent in C++ than English. Although Black Isle developed the story of Fallout 1 and 2 as a team, they hired Mark O'Green to write all of the distinctive dialogue for the game in order to take the feel of

Warren Ellis to write the dialogue and cut scenes for Hostile Waters: Antaeus Rising. This sharp writing helped push the game over the line to a PC Powerplay Gold Award.

Even id is getting in on the act for it's upcoming FPS Doom 3. From the word dot the company has skated by on fast gameplay, memorable monsters and level design without a whiff of a decent plot. Id has a fair idea of what its gamers want and for some reason this time around, when it comes to lovingly reviving one of the fathers of frantic frag, story has become a priority. Sci-fi writer Matthew Costello of 7th Guest and 11th Hour fame has been called to arms.



Collaboration

Games writing is always going to be a collaborative effort - just like modern programming. Someone makes an AI which meshes into an animator's motions which in turn fit a modeller's character. Deciphering who writes a game becomes as tough as pinning down who gets the credit for a character with the hot looks, smooth moves and sassy smarts. That's not going to change.

What will change is that specially hired storywriters will become as common as programmers, animators and modellers. They'll probably never be household names, but at least if we scour the credits we'll know who to blame for the lousy one-liners.

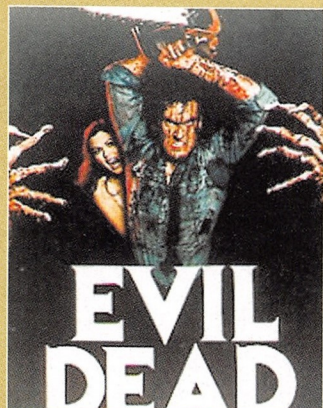


Writers we'd like to see in the biz...

Sam Raimi, Writer/Director

The Evil Dead films are cult classics. Look at what Raimi managed with some dodgy zombie effects, fake blood and laughing furniture. Great visual style, pacing and throw-away lines. He also created the cult everyman hero-turned-maniac, Ash.

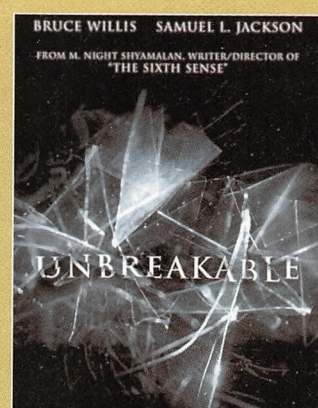
Type of Project: Hero-based RTS - who wants some?



M. Night Shyamalan, Writer/Director

Sixth Sense, Unbreakable and now Signs take the genres of ghost, superhero and alien movies to a different level, telling stories about people and not special effects without backing away from the fantastic.

Type of Project: Kung-fu fantasy action / RPG / adventure



Wanna write the games?

Your best bet is still to get training in some games related field, be noticed through the mod scene or be lucky enough to become a beta tester and then graduate to being a games designer.

If you are looking for somewhere to study writing for games in Australia, the Academy of Interactive Entertainment is probably the place to go. There is no writing course as such but the rest of the games development course will give students a thorough grounding in the industry and the final year consists of making a game.

Director of the AIE, Gareth Davies, explains, "Prior experience as a game designer helps, but the main qualities are a high standard of literacy and the ability to interpret media and literature."

Beyond that, you've got to know your games. He says, "Being able to refer to many games and the specifics of the narrative provided by that game is essential to provide reference for students."



John Woo, Director

Choreographs a gunfight like Michelangelo doodles chapel ceilings. His mastery of two-pistol gunplay means using a firearm is no longer a matter of merely squeezing a trigger. Just keep him away from Hollywood.

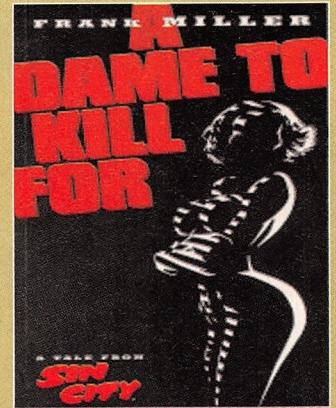
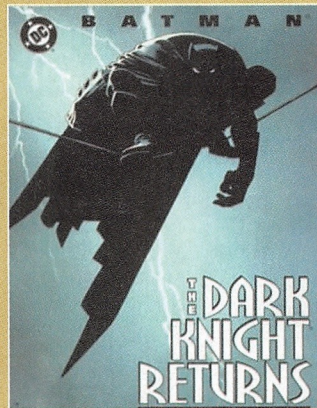
Type of Project: FPS all the way



Frank Miller, Writer

Revitalised Batman and the comic industry with his tale of Bruce Wayne's downward spiral after coming out of retirement in The Dark Knight Returns. All his titles ooze style and grit - ingredients which should be smeared liberally across the gaming world.

Type of project: Cel-shaded mystery adventure



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INREVIEW

The most authoritative reviews around



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- 83** Largo Winch

Greetings! A bit of a switcheroo this month, mostly because Jere wanted the preview intro to talk about his experiences with Battlefield 1942 Online, but also partly because I wanted to pass comment on some of the fine games we've gathered for this month's reviews section.

Another brace of sequels and expansions has come our way, from the fabulous (Icewind Dale 2) to the palatable but ultimately uninspiring (AvP2 Primal Hunt), all the way down to the merely passable (Delta Force 4: Task Force Dagger). We also picked up a rare bird in the form of Chessmaster 9000.

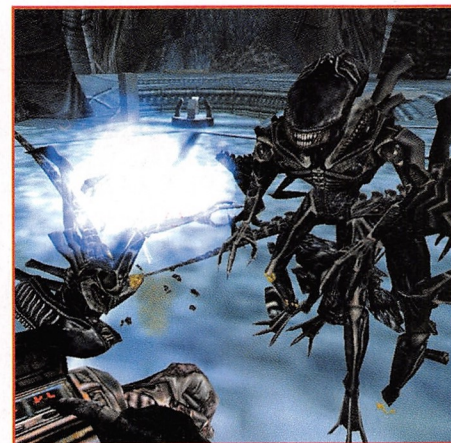
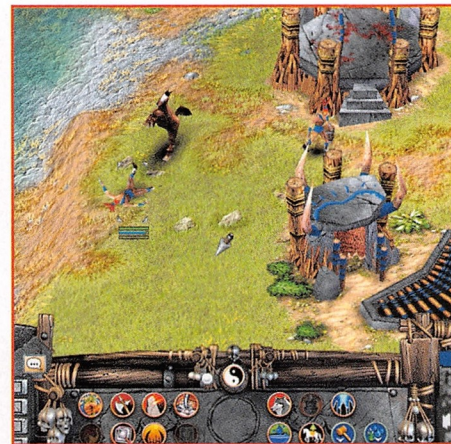
This cruel little game savagely toyed with Jere for days on end. You see, as I believe he mentions in his review, he naturally assumed the higher a ranking number, the less-skilled an AI opponent would be. However, after being repeatedly beaten in eight moves by a simulated 6-year-old chess prodigy, he soon realised that a player with a ranking of 13 would be a far easier prospect than one with a ranking of 2400. That's not to say the blind Labrador retriever didn't give him a run for his money either, though.

Moving on to my own gaming experience for this month, I got my mitts on the hotly awaited AvP2 expansion Primal Hunt. And I dunno, maybe we've been spoilt by tantalising previews of the likes of Deus Ex 2 and Doom 3, but the graphics in the Littech engine just don't do it for me anymore. It looks like nothing more than a cardboard cut-out representation of the Aliens vs Predator world. This isn't helped by the fact that Littech doesn't support curved surfaces and Pilot technology is essentially organic and Geiger-esque.

Finally though, you should check out the review of Football Mania on page 80. This surprising little game should have been childish and simplistic, what with its Lego branding, but instead it proved surprisingly fun and even a little bit sophisticated. At least that was my take on it, Jere may have had different ideas.

So all in all a generally pleasing crop of games for the month of September and certainly enough to keep us busy through the somewhat awkward early Spring. But steel yourselves, folks - the big ones are just around the corner. It's going to be a hell of a Christmas!

Justin Hoffman
letters@pcpowerplay.com.au



THE PCPP REVIEW RATINGS SYSTEM



- 90+** Gold Award. A classic, everyone will love this game.
- 89-80** A strong title that's hard to fault. But perhaps not the best in its field.
- 79-60** Competent and playable. For fans of the genre.
- 59-40** Decidedly average, probably boring.
- 39-0** A dog. Bad, shamelessly unoriginal, cheap and horrible. Avoid.

- Need** The minimum requirements to get the game running at a playable speed.
- Want** The ideal system requirements for the game.
- For** The major reasons why you'll like the reviewed game.
- Against** The major reasons why you won't.

Icewind Dale 2

So cool it'll freeze the proverbials off a brass monkey

DETAILS

DEVELOPER

Black Isle

PUBLISHER

Interplay

DISTRIBUTOR

Interplay

PRICE

\$89.95

RATING

M15

AVAILABLE

Now



BottleOpener of Ilmater about to be eaten



Take that! No-one can survive my fairy light force! WEEEE!



Berriar the Buxom

SYSTEM

NEED

PIII-400
128MB RAM
16MB Videocard
1GB (including
swapfile) HDD

WANT

P4/Athlon XP
1700+
512MB RAM
64MB Videocard
2.02GB (including
swapfile) HDD

It's been two years since the release of Icewind Dale and Black Isle has been hard at work refining the eighth incarnation of the Infinity engine from Baldur's Gate to once again catapult gamers into the frozen mountains of the very popular Dungeons & Dragons Forgotten Realms. With its emphasis on atmosphere, more linear gameplay and clear quest directions, IWD2 takes all the best parts of the Baldur's Gate series and masterfully refines it to draw you into a wonderfully detailed world for a more active RPG experience.

Upon starting Icewind Dale 2 (IWD2) the first thing that strikes you is the inability to import any previous characters from the original game. This, according to the programmers, was due to balance reasons because they wanted to make a challenging and entertaining game from the outset without having to worry about imbalances caused by previous parties.

To assist those new to the RPG genre, at character creation you're given the option of selecting a pre-made party which is well balanced, effective and a good choice for trouble-free gaming. For those that like to make their own party, that option is fully available with races

including humans, dwarves, elves, gnomes, halflings, half orcs and half elves. Whichever choice you make, you will need a full party as you can't join up NPCs later on in the game.

More races than Flemington

Within each pure race there are sub-races. The human race has the Aasimar who have celestial blood in them and are good-aligned whereas the Tiefling are their demonic counterparts. There are three sub-races of dwarves: Shield Dwarves, Gold Dwarves and Grey Dwarves. Shield Dwarves are the stock standard dwarf. Gold Dwarves are shrewd traders and proud warriors. Grey Dwarves live underground where they practice slavery and are known as devious and greedy but efficient warriors. Your basic elf is a Moon Elf and the two sub-races are the Drow, which are Dark Elves known for their arrogance and cruelty and Wild Elves who hail from the woods and receive stealth and casting bonuses. Your common garden variety gnome (once again I couldn't resist) is the Rock Gnome and Deep Gnomes receive extra bonuses but level much slower - about three levels behind that of a normal race. The base

hobbit-like halfling is referred to as a Lightfoot Halfling, the Strongheart Halflings are stout fighters and will not flee in battle (higher saving throws) and the Ghostwise Halflings make better barbarians than their roguish cousins. From each of these races, you can choose any of the standard D&D second edition (2E) classes: barbarian, bard, cleric, druid, fighter, monk, paladin, ranger, rogue, sorcerer and wizard. Unfortunately it makes no difference whether you chose a sub-class that's evil or good as you're still given the option of making them any alignment you want. Tieflings can be 'lawful good' and likewise the Aasimar can be 'chaotic evil'.

Repel the goblin hordes!!

Once your party is generated, you're thrust right into a major event. This is a particularly nice touch because instead of being sent to run around doing silly newbie errands like in the original Icewind Dale (something that NPCs humorously refer to in-game), you disembark into a city under siege. Surrounded by wounded soldiers and fleeing civilians, you need to discover why the goblins have tunnelled through a series of old mines to invade Targos.

Your initial task is to clear the city of



Hey relax guys, I meant "Half-evolved Fecal Matter" in an affectionate way, honestly.



Do that Ring of Fire Trick, come on! Do it, do it, do it, do it, do it!!!



And she's smoten, and he's smoten, and I'll smite these guys...

said goblins which means a lot of fighting and brushing up on those potentially old combat skills. Using a further modified engine from Baldur's Gate 2, combat is the same mix of realtime and turn-based play that many are familiar with. At any point in combat it's possible to hit the spacebar to pause the game, allowing you to select what action each of your party members will take. You can set up casters to nuke the enemy and fighters to charge out and tank them while the rogue sneaks around to back-stab. When combat encounters are a given win, no pausing is required and you can leave it up to your party to dispatch the enemy in realtime using the engine's powerful AI routines.

The mix of the 2E and third edition (3E) D&D rules means that the game may be a little disappointing for pen and paper purists but makes for a much more entertaining computer game. Gone is THAC0 (to hit armour class zero) and the confusing 2E armour system which is replaced by the more sensible 3E armour rankings where the higher the AC, the better the armour. Base attacks also feature with all characters receiving an attack bonus at each level, giving more frail classes such as casters and rogues a greater chance of survival in combat.

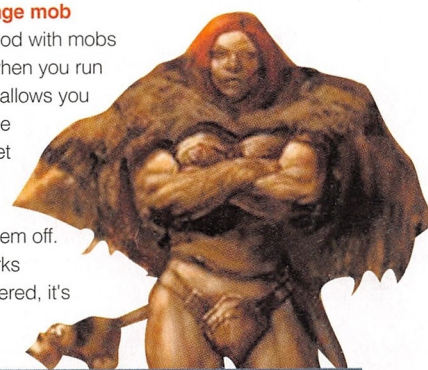
Spells

The spell system also uses 3E rules and features all the magic you would expect in any 3E game such as NWN. The positive side to this is that it sticks to the Dungeons & Dragons spell system faithfully, which appeals to D&D fans. For those of us who aren't particularly fussed about rule sets though, you can't help but feel a sense of sameness. After playing with them in BG1, BG2, IWD1 and now NWN, the same old spells are becoming somewhat wearisome.

Resting, a system that was elegantly repaired in NWN, is once again back to its painful self in IWD2. As per the D&D rules, only one memorised spell can be cast a day with characters needing to rest to heal up and re-memorise. In IWD2 however, finding a place to rest can be quite difficult. You basically need to seek out abandoned houses or return to an inn. When outside or dungeon crawling, it's often very difficult to find a resting place and 80 per cent of the time you are told you "simply can't rest here" or else risk ambush. At least there's no annoying rest cut scene. A more NWN system, where you had to sit for a period of time to regenerate HP and spells, would have made the game even more playable.

Smarter than your average mob

Monster AI is relatively good with mobs that will track you down when you run from them. This however, allows you to use a combat technique called kiting where you get the mobs to chase a character and use the rest of the party to pick them off. Even though this only works when you're not outnumbered, it's unfortunate some kind of



Humour

An aspect of IWD2 that enhances the atmosphere of the game is some excellent use of humour. For example, upon entering the palisade there's a group of men training against barrels that also highlight as breakable objects. Breaking the barrel, whether deliberately or accidentally, elicits an amusing response from the captain training them about the stupidity of adventurers. The men themselves will also stand around uttering comments such as "So, should we just swing at the air now?" Another amusing scenario has two training archers trying in vain to hit a barrel which, when you place the mouse over it, is described as "a smug looking barrel". Other light-hearted content can be found almost everywhere, often in the form of NPC dialogue such as the messenger boy who facilitates easy movement around the city and comments on how slow adventurers are.



Total Destruction, you know you want it, you vandals



YEEGGGEEAAARRGGHH! YECK! EWWW! *shudder*



Where are all the bunny rabbits and squirrels?



agro tracking doesn't cause the mob to switch and engage another target. To the AI's credit, mobs will also use hit and run tactics when they can, particularly archers in an attempt to kite you back, which is rather amusing until they call for reinforcements. The difficulty setting is also a lot more reasonable and normal mode actually allows you to play comfortably without having to worry about dying and restarting every five minutes (cough, Baldur's Gate I & II, cough).

Main quest

The main quest of IWD2 is compelling and is set in the Ten Towns of IWD1 amidst the

Spine of the World Mountains. Thirty years after the original, a new danger has arisen in the form of goblin hordes backed by an unknown power that are attempting to overrun Targos and subjugate all of the Ten Towns. Not only does this main quest make for an exciting introduction to the game, but it is extremely entertaining. After turning away the initial goblin invasion, you're sent to the north gates of Targos to help reinforce the town before the next attack. Despite being quest-heavy all the quests are doable with NPCs giving clear and concise instructions on where to go and what to do. Reinforcing Targos in the early stage of the game was far more entertaining than just hacking and slashing your way through a dungeon. NPCs went about their business finishing off the city's new walls whilst soldiers training for the big battle would happily receive any combat advice (for a nice exp bonus) you had to offer them. When you finally finished the reinforcement quests, the raid on the town offered exciting and challenging combat. A very nice touch was being able to run into a house for healing while still hearing the battle outside, which amounted for an

engrossing play experience. The mini-quests proved to be interesting, sentimental, funny and are best left unmentioned to not spoil any surprises.

Travel

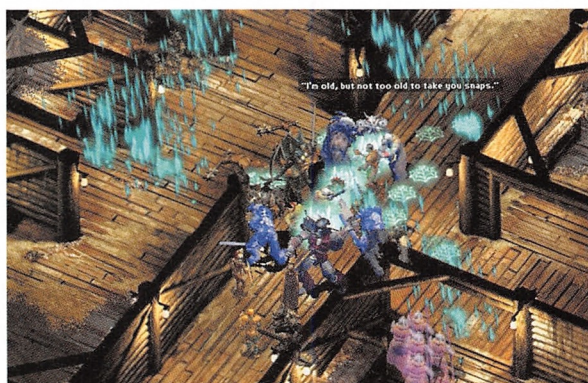
Anyone who's had experience with the Infinity engine will know that it's plagued with pathing bugs which, in IWD2, are greatly improved but still not quite perfect. Thankfully your party only very rarely gets stuck on buildings but still takes a separate path to their destination as opposed to just following each other. This gets particularly annoying when you request that your party move to a location and five characters get there just fine but the sixth has decided to take the scenic route, setting off every trap on the way and dying. Zoning uses the same system of having to get all your characters to the edge of the screen in order to access the next map but there are instances where the game provides some conveniences. Early in the game, this comes in the form of a small messenger boy who knows all the fast ways around the city and you simply need to speak to him to have your party instantly (no matter where they are) teleported to the zone you select.

Multiplay

Multiplay has always been a big feature of the Infinity engine and in IWD2 this hasn't changed. You're given the option of hosting a TCP game for a local network where up to six players can play one character each or two players can play three each, etc. As each time the server is loaded it can be initialised from a save game, it's possible (particularly if you use Gamespy to play over the internet) to host and play a game with different people through every leg of your adventure.



Well at least it's warmer now



Last drinks everyone



Maladoria the Shy

Very high resolutions

Despite being a purely sprite-based isometric engine with some 3D effects thrown in for good measure, IWD2 looks great and can achieve very high resolutions that range from 640x480 to 1024x768. For those with extreme machines, there's also the option to play at 1600x1200 (two times 800x600) and 2048x1536 (two times 1024x768). There's a certain charm about sprite-based games that could only be found in our new world order of 3D gaming. Being freed of texture memory requirements and geometry to be processed, IWD2's graphics are sharp, highly stylised and with a great hand-painted fantasy look that's been popularised by D&D artists all over the world. In particular the acrylic/water colour look of the character portraits are both plentiful and first rate.

The zones themselves are beautifully put together and convey a frozen world with biting winds and chilling, frigid landscapes. There's something beautiful about the frozen climates in IWD2 that generates a convincing sense of the cold harsh climate. The fact that NPCs often refer to the chill also helps to reinforce this. Actually, the arctic conditions add a lot to

the atmosphere of the game, especially for the vast majority of us in this country who only see snow on ski trips. Spell effects are also quite good but obviously not in the league of NWN with its fully 3D engine. Still they're certainly not bad, but nowhere near as colourful or dramatic as they could be.

Whistling winds with a cinematic score

The sound in IWD2 is top notch. There's full EAX support for surround sound gaming with the different effects all put to good use. If you enter a dungeon or cavern, then reverb is increased for echoes while outdoor environments sound more open. Ambient sounds feature plentifully and greatly enhance the atmosphere of the game. Being in the frozen mountains of Icewind Dale, you hear the sound of cold biting winds, footsteps in the snow and the occasional bird that dares the cold. If you walk past an inn, the noises of the patrons can be heard inside and as you move away becomes softer in the distance. Other niceties include the sounds of sleeping dogs around the fireplace at an inn and the spooky wailings of a distraught ghost. A good job has been done with the voice acting and there are 42 different tracks (21 female, 21 male) to

choose for your characters.

The in-game music is also exceptional, even for a Black Isle effort. The score is best described as cinematic orchestral and is similar in style and grandiosity to big Hollywood productions. When you or the town you're in is under siege, powerful (and occasionally a little loud) tracks portray the sense of urgency of what's happening around you. When the situation is calmer, brighter tracks keep the mood pleasant. In all, the musical pieces add greatly to the atmosphere and grand feel of the game as well as being highly entertaining to listen to in their own right.

Conclusion

Despite using the dated Infinity engine, IWD2 offers a fantastic frozen atmosphere, a compelling story and a more fluid gaming experience. Fans of group-based RPGs will be thrilled with everything that IWD2 has to offer and new gamers will enjoy the polished/tweaked engine and engrossing story. Icewind Dale 3, particularly if it uses the NWN Aurora engine, in the hands of the extremely talented Black Isle group, will be something special indeed.

Jere Lawrence

RATING

FOR

- Atmosphere and story
- Well balanced combat engine
- Clear well defined quests

AGAINST

- Annoying to loot and you only have one inventory bag
- Some problems with pathing
- Disorganised journal

OVERALL

A great adventure set in a fantastic environment. Only let down by limitations in the engine such as mediocre pathing and poorly structured journal

87

The Thing

The term horror survival finally lives up to its name



DETAILS

DEVELOPER

Computer Artworks

PUBLISHER

Black Label

DISTRIBUTOR

Vivendi

PRICE

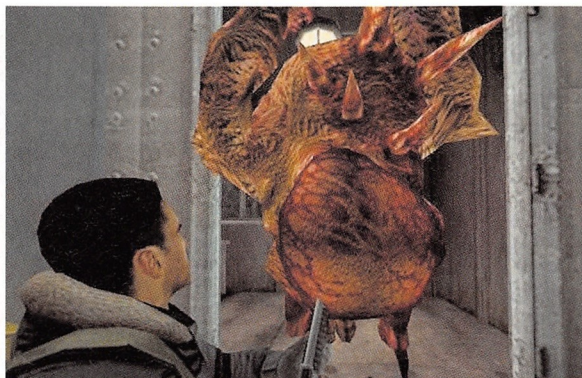
\$89.95

RATING

MA15+

AVAILABLE

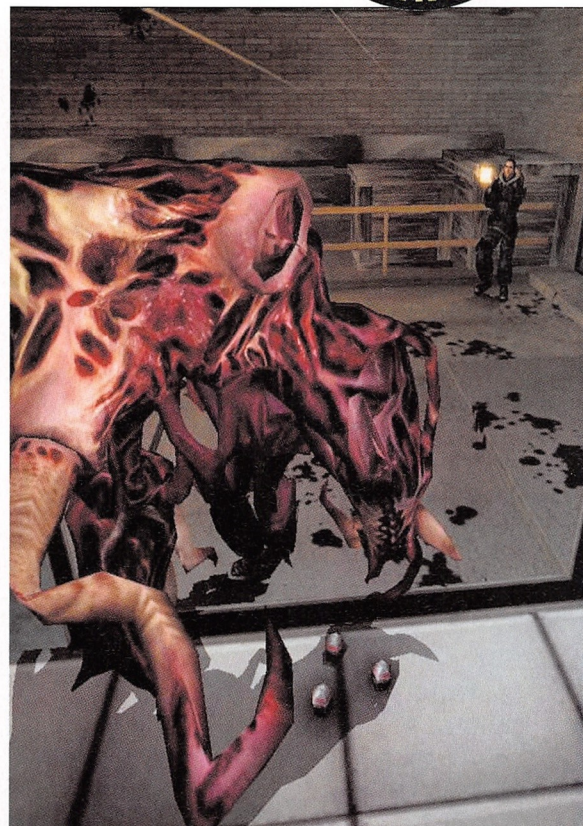
Now



Mum!?



If you're not careful you'll blow someone's head off with that thing



Splat-tastic!

SYSTEM

NEED

PIII 500

128MB RAM

16MB Videocard

400MB HDD

WANT

Pentium 4 or

AMD Athlon XP+

256MB RAM

32MB Videocard

400MB HDD

With this year's cold, biting winter behind us it's time to relive those chilly months with another game set in sub-zero conditions. *Icewind Dale 2* transported us to the frozen peaks of the *Forgotten Lands* and now *The Thing*, set in the Arctic conditions of the far north gets set to chill us to the bone, in more ways than just the physical.

It would have been easy for Computer Artworks to turn *The Thing* into nothing more than a FPS with little substance to give justice to the tense drama of the 1982 movie. It's awesome news then that they didn't. Although there's still plenty of shooting, *The Thing* is more about suspense, horror and the management of your frightened team rather than run-and-gun room clearing.

From the opening cinematic that shows the chilling and particularly gory deaths of the last two outpost members, you're constantly reminded by your squad mates and the liberal use of terse cut scenes, that *The Thing* is never far away and stalking your every move.

A game with plenty of class

A pleasing innovation is that your squad-mates have different classes and serve multiple purposes. Soldiers have the best accuracy with weapons and the greatest courage, allowing them to stay calm while the rest of your team is panicking. As weapons and ammo are sparse, if you only have one weapon you're better off giving it to a soldier.

Medics are invaluable and will heal you and any injured squad members without having to use up a valuable healing kit. Medics are, however, the weakest class and need to be used tactically. The best method is to park them just outside the action so you can use them for healing without exposing their porcelain selves to the extreme danger present.

Engineers behave like portable tool kits and are a necessity to gain access to some areas of the game. Although your character can do some repairs himself, there are times when the skills of an engineer offer the only way through. For this reason, you need to take good care of them.

Your team consists of more than just dumb NPCs though. Computer Artworks

has expended a lot of programmer energy into ensuring that your squad-mates feel fear and experience paranoia from the suspenseful and horrific situation they find themselves in. Interacting with your team members involves only a simple press of a button to bring up a comprehensive interface. The first use of the squad menu is to ascertain how much your squad trust you and how afraid they are.

To save or not to save

In a particularly annoying console style, *The Thing* doesn't allow you to save your game when you want. Instead, save stations need to be used. Yes, this makes the game more challenging and ensures deaths mean something but FFS why can't they give us five quick save tokens per level or something. After all, we're people with lives and it's not always convenient to have to find a save point when the real world interrupts.



"You don't belong here."



OK, best out of three. Paper, scissors, rock!



Ozzy Osbourne takes a turn for the worse

Trust me, I know what I'm doing

Trust plays a significant part in *The Thing* because the alien entity has the ability to take the form of any creature it has come into contact with. This means that your men can be infected, walking time bombs waiting to go off when you're at your most vulnerable. The only way to establish whether your men are alien hosts or not is through the use of a blood test hypo. It's also necessary to use the hypo on yourself when your men are having trouble trusting you to prove to the highly sophisticated AI that you're indeed the one in control and not the alien.

It's OK to be afraid

Fear is another NPC action that has to be taken into consideration. Bringing up the NPC interface displays a headshot of any men (teammates and other NPCs) near you with their fear measured visually rather than with a graph. If an NPC is OK, he will look around casually from left to right. If he's noticeably frightened, he'll look around in a panic. If he's about to lose it and crack up, he'll shake uncontrollably. Fear is the primary ingredient of this exceptional game, bringing an emotive element into the action that's been sorely missing from

our gaming lives. If you're in a room and hear a strange sound, it could just be a drip or it could be a "Thingy" (miniature Thing) scuttling by. Your teammates will not only hear the sound, but, if they can't identify it, will become a little more afraid. Squad-mates will also become more frightened based on what they see in the environment around them. For example, in the opening levels of the game you encounter a corpse that has been completely decapitated and its body parts strewn all over the room. Your engineer, upon seeing this, completely freaks out. The only way to relieve his stress is to give him a weapon and some ammunition. Although a thoroughly innovative gaming feature, the 'give a weapon to make 'em feel better' approach feels somewhat akin to handing a child a dummy. To completely quell an NPC's level of fear, you need only use a hypo full of adrenaline which seems rather strange. Hello?? Adrenaline??? Wouldn't that just make them even more freaked out?

For those with combat fatigue

Combat within the game is handled well, but to reiterate, the primary focus in *The Thing* is not to resolve each problem with

weapons (pistol, machine gun, shotgun, flamethrower and a blowtorch).

The eyes have it

Graphically, *The Thing* is not as state of the Art as *Unreal 2* but has a style and look to it similar to *Max Payne*. A key factor in giving it this look is the way that lights play on the surrounding environment. Light up your flamethrower and the refraction of the orange flame will play off the wall, your avatar and your squad-mates. In heavy fire-fights with muzzle flashes and orange flames lighting up the area, you're placed within an intense environment that perfectly heightens the suspense. Your avatar and squad-mates have an extremely high poly count that makes for some very realistic looking models and all have a different face and facial structure, plus each is uniquely outfitted. The level of detail in the environments

Crash Warning

Although *The Thing* ran perfectly on two machines at work, on my machine at home, which has never experienced any kind of problem, it would reboot the machine whenever I turned the in-game torch on. This could point to a BIOS incompatibility or simply an overall incompatibility. I've provided this warning not necessarily as a criticism but to inform - nothing SuXXors more than spending hours trying to diagnose the problem with your machine only to discover it was never your fault in the first place.



"Sshhh, OK dude, I think we finally lost it..."



"Get it off me, get it off me, get it off me, get it off me..."



There's something not quite right about this dental surgery



Hey guys, my breath looks like smoke. Check it out

themselves is excellent and utilises some lovely textures. Although not bump mapped, the high-res textures still look realistic and detailed enough that they definitely convey feelings of a cold, icy environment. An area of the graphics where they absolutely excel is outdoors where the snow falls and chilly winds shift the particle flakes around with convincing realism. Due to the northerly environments of *The Thing* and the time of year that you're there, the constant twilight casts a

warm peachy glow on the snow that's quite beautiful to observe. At other times, a heavy snowfall will blow in and the whole scene turns grey with chill winds. No matter what the real-world temperature, you receive an overwhelming desire to go and put a jumper on. To reiterate, this chill in the game also adds a pleasant challenge

in that you can't stay outdoors too long before dying of exposure and you need to constantly seek the shelter of a warm doorway.

There's plenty of vertex shading and morphing in *The Thing*, particularly when one of your squad-mates transforms into the alien. Blood and gore sprays everywhere and tentacles burst out of the victim's body in some rather frightening and realistic animations. As can be seen from the screenshots, the many different forms of *The Thing* have been lovingly modelled with some truly freakish and hideous creations.

Cut scenes are used to both startle you and warn you of things to come. In typical horror movie fashion, a cut scene can pop up when you least expect it, either of something gruesome happening or to convey how you're being stalked by *The Thing*. Although it might seem ridiculous that a cut scene can be scary, the way they occur and the style they play out in successfully manages to make you jump, which is quite fun.

Fruity sonics

The sound to *The Thing* is quite good but not fantastic. The lack of EAX or even A3D

sound support was particularly disappointing as it would have been the perfect addition to add extra creepiness to the game. Otherwise all the usual sound effects you could imagine have been included. There's the sound of the frigid winds blowing, the all-pervading gunshots as well as the occasional piece of cinematic orchestral music to connote a new area or to reward success. The voices of your squad-mates are recorded well and, when panicking, actually sound genuinely afraid and not forced. For those that like their language colourful, the use of the word sh*t is used quite liberally throughout the game. For the modders out there, an amusing addition would be to have a South Park style counter that counted how many times the word was used.

In short

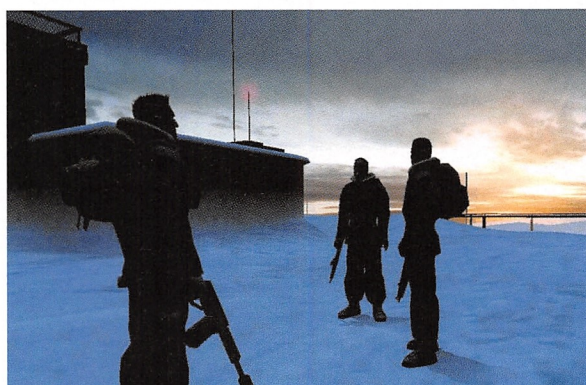
Overall, *The Thing* is a brilliant realisation of the horror survival genre that's meant to totally creep you out in that edge-of-the-seat cinematic style that shows *Resident Evil* for what it is - that being a kiddie style B-grade zombie mod that would wet its pants if it ever encountered the kind of nail-biting suspense and paranoid tension found in *Computer Artworks'* masterpiece.

HEAVE, HO

Vomiting may not seem like a fitting addition to a computer game, but in *The Thing* it's an excellent medium for conveying the feelings of your men. When your squad-mates encounter a particularly gruesome blood-stained environment or a frightening decapitated corpse, they will sometimes vomit and leave a rather gross yellow and green texture on the ground. Thankfully, due to a lack of bump mapping, there are no chunky bits.



He probably just wants to make friends



"Boy, is it cold out here. Who's up for some burritos?"



"You look like you'd make a fine couple but, well, you know how it is."

Be proud, PC owners. The Thing is a mature game that caters perfectly to our demographic.

Jere and Ruth Lawrence

John W. Campbell:
Not just some
crusty old dude,
but Father of
The Thing



In 1937 John W. Campbell, a physics graduate from MIT, became editor of the science-fiction magazine, Astounding. Campbell is credited with transforming the exploding galaxies of magazine science-fiction into a genre that was intelligent and stylish. As editor, he discovered Isaac Asimov, Robert A. Heinlein, Lester del Rey, Theodore Sturgeon and A. E. van Vogt - and Asimov attributed him with the Three Laws of Robotics. His 1948 novella "Who Goes There?" has been made into two movies - The Thing From Another World (1951) and The Thing (1982).

The Thing From Another World (1951)

In 1951, when the Cold War threat of nuclear destruction hung over everyone's heads and reports of flying saucers were beginning, The Thing From Another World was one of the first movies to launch the alien craze and explore the suspense of an isolated group being picked off one by one, a formula utilised superbly decades later in the classic movie Aliens.

A spaceship is discovered under the ice in the Arctic by a military unit. After they incompetently destroy the ship, they take back to Arctic Base all that's left: a humanoid form. Once thawed out, the alien Thing proves to be an intelligent plant form that is also incredibly hungry for blood. It goes on the rampage, until it is finally electrocuted. Directed by Christian Nyby, James Arness was plastered with heavy makeup to play the ravenous giant carrot. This movie is a classic of its era.

The Thing (1982)

The Thing which opened the same night as E.T. grossed \$13.8M in the first three weeks then bombed, panned by critics for its gore content and shunned by audiences who preferred the warm fuzziness of Spielberg's 'lil long-necked guy who only wanted to go home. Now, 20 years later, this story of 12 men trapped in an Antarctic research station, menaced by a hostile alien, has become a cult classic. Universal Studios put up \$10 million to launch director John Carpenter into the big time. \$1.5 million was spent on special effects which took up to a year to complete. Rob Bottin (The Howling) and Alan Whitlock created a gruesome, agile creature that transforms and attacks in full view of the audience. Stan Winston (Aliens and The Predator) created the Norwegian dog attack scene. Carpenter focuses on the increasing paranoia of the characters and the tension is heightened by the isolated setting and Ennio Morricone's soundtrack.

RATING

FOR

- Brilliant and scary atmosphere
- Excellent cutscenes
- NPC fear and trust levels

AGAINST

- Can be too easy to get stuck on puzzles
- Prone to crash on certain systems
- Lack of quick saves

OVERALL

The best survival horror game for the PC to date

94

Chessmaster 9000

Where blind Labradors kick you in the goolies



DETAILS

DEVELOPER

Ubisoft

PUBLISHER

Ubisoft

DISTRIBUTOR

Ubisoft Aus.

PRICE

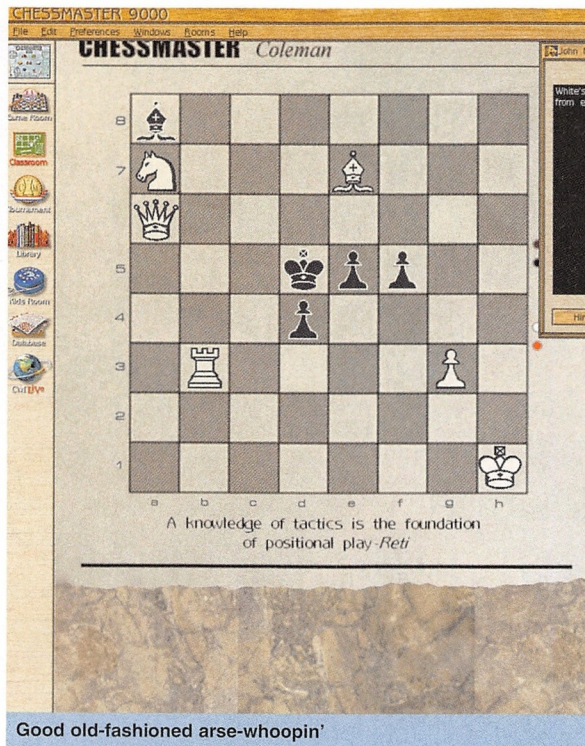
\$89.95

RATING

N/A

AVAILABLE

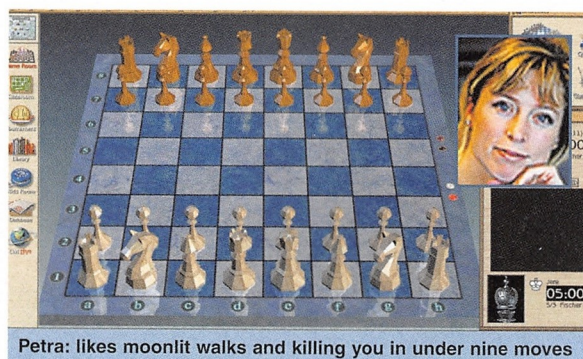
Now



Good old-fashioned arse-whoopin'



Jade: cute smile but will rip the guts out of your Queen



Petra: likes moonlit walks and killing you in under nine moves

SYSTEM

NEED

PIII 450
128MB RAM
8MB Videocard
220MB HDD

WANT

PIII 550
128MB RAM
16MB Videocard
220MB HDD

There's one certainty in the world of computers that no matter what the processor or how obscure the system, you can be assured that a chess program will be developed for it. This of course would be due to the fact that chess is one of the best turn-based strategy games ever made and accounts for its popularity over the centuries.

Chess programs have always been strong in the PC world. From the days of the original Chessmaster that ran on an IBM PC/AT to the VGA eye-candy of Battle Chess back in 1991, chess programs remain a staple diet in the food chain of computer gaming. Given the number of chess programs out there, particularly free ones, it would take a strong product to convince consumers to part with their money - Chessmaster 9000 is this product. More of a comprehensive chess experience than just a chess program, CM9000 is delightfully broad and accessible to chess players from beginner to master level.

Bells and whistles galore

The feature set of CM9000 is astounding. Starting the program, you first need to create a player and then login, a necessity because CM9000 uses the international chess ranking system where the higher your score, the better a player you are. This level of customisation allows all the members of a family to login individually

and play a game of chess with a properly matched opponent without having to worry about changing settings each and every time.

CM9000 is just oozing with nice touches; the first to greet you is the login screen which offers a quick chess-based problem to solve. Puzzles include what piece to move to mate in one, best move and escaping mate puzzles. Once logged in, you're greeted with a pleasant menu that gives you the option of doing some study in the Library, learning the basics and advanced tactics of chess in the Classroom or playing a tournament match against an equally rated opponent that improves or decreases your overall rank. Other options include the Game Room where a non-ranked friendly match can be played, a commented database (from the second CD) of famous matches, tutorials and a kids room where younger players can take on opponents with more simplistic AI routines.

A fount of knowledge on a shiny disc

The chess library is where you can go to watch famous classic matches, read a glossary of chess terms, read up on opening book moves from famous chess players and even edit your own opening book to further increase the AI's ability. One of the more amusing classic matches from 1619 between Gioachino Greco and an unknown opponent resulted in the

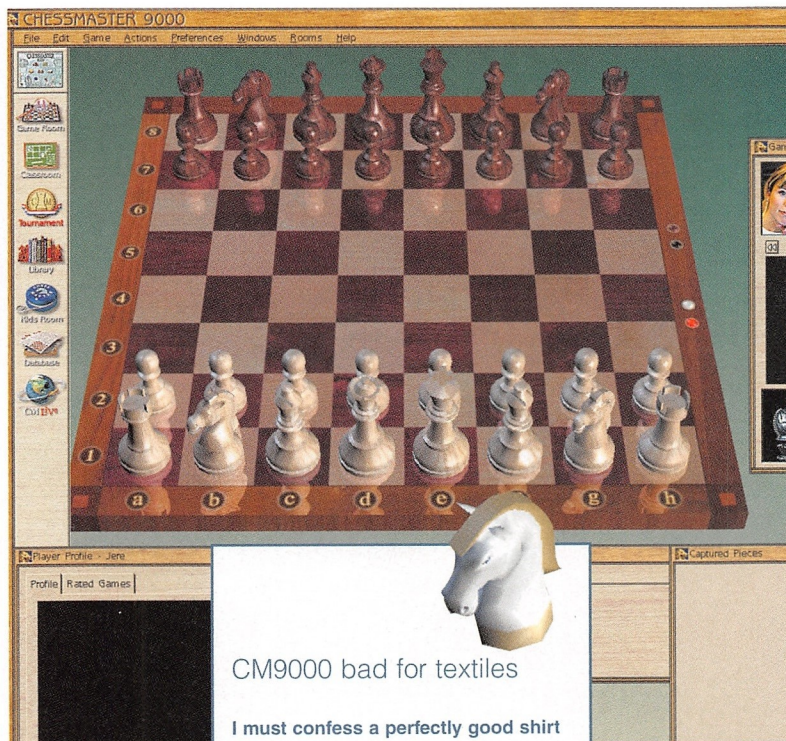
unnamed one being whooped in eight moves (history was kind not to remember his name). Throughout the match, Chessmaster commentates on each move and the closing statement of "Even after four centuries, some games can still elicit a smile" was particularly apt. Although in your saved games you can write your own annotation, it wasn't possible to edit the pre-existing ones. A shame because I rather wanted to change it to "Woah, unnamed player got Own3d!!"

Classroom

One of the best features of CM9000, the Classroom is the place to go to learn all different kinds of strategies and closing moves. It's rather like having a completely interactive chess guide at your disposal and then some. There are tutorials that teach then quiz you on the board, opening moves, basic chess concepts, beginning strategies, basic themes and tactics and positions. Drills are meant to sharpen your skills and develop a keener eye for seeing potential checkmate situations as well as teaching through some great examples. Drills include taking unprotected pieces, finding the fork (an attack on two enemy chessmen at the same time), finding check, piece pinning, moving to safety, finding mate in one, avoiding mate, mate with king and pawn, position memorisation, mate in two, as well as mating combinations with different pieces such as



Chess in period costume: doesn't make it any easier



CM9000 bad for textiles

bishop and knight or king and queen vs. king and rook among other challenges.

By far a nice aspect of the Classroom is the puzzles which are delightful brain benders that offer a very real mental challenge and are quite famous, having been written by authors from the 1800s to the 21st century. The beauty of the puzzles is that if you only have 15 minutes to spare, you can happily wrap your mind around just one. Be warned though - it's possible to really lose a lot of time, so compelling are they.

The engine

The actual chess engine itself is very strong and can be catered to whatever skill level the player is. Know your ranking though. As CM9000 plays an incredibly strong game, particularly at master mode, the higher the ranking, the better the player. The ranking system is by far one of the best means of tracking a player's skill level as it's possible to take tournament matches where the outcome affects your overall ranking. Winning will increase your rank and losing will decrease it. What this amounts to is that every game you play will be matched appropriately to your skill level. Instead of jumping between difficulty settings where one game is too easy and another too hard, the gradual increase of skill keeps the chess games constantly challenging and particularly addictive. Fast games are another nice addition

where you can set the overall time each player has for the entire game. Not only does this put pressure on the CPU to make a move, but it keeps the game fast paced and entertaining.

Adding to the overall chess experience is a series of programmed AI routines that play the game differently. Simulated opponents have different strengths and play styles. Some AI personalities play a more aggressive game where others play a more defensive one. There are even AIs that are cautious with their queen or more reckless. To CM9000's credit, the different personalities definitely live up to their descriptions and make for fascinatingly different play experiences. For the ultimate challenge, it's also possible to play online against opponents around the world through Ubisoft's matching service. Not surprisingly, lag is not an issue (hehe).

Graphically CM9000 is quite pleasant to look at but this is, after all, a serious chess program and more programming resources have been spent making spectacular AI rather than flashy fully 3D accelerated graphics. That said, the chess board and pieces are indeed 3D with numerous chess sets and piece designs that can be selected from. The board can also be viewed at any angle and rotated to aid in making your move. Although the review version we have wasn't quite complete, the full version will feature shadows and bump mapping with

I must confess a perfectly good shirt got seriously stained in my testing of CM9000. I had just sat down with a nice cup of coffee ready for a serious game at master level when just before the tenth move the message pops up saying, "Checkmate. White loses." Was I ready for this? No - a fact emphasised by the mouthful of coffee that went slopping all over my shirt as my jaw gaped uncontrollably. Now I'm not excusing myself, but due to the power of current processors the CM9000 engine can think hard and generates hundreds of thousands of moves in seconds and really, really plays a mean game. Honest.

reflections already finished. Sonically CM9000 is also quite good. With every move an agreeable voice speaks the move and all text in tutorials is pleasantly and calmly spoken to you.

Overall, CM9000 plays an excellent game of chess, caters to all levels of gamer and is bundled with loads of extras such as extremely challenging and entertaining puzzles. It would be easy for some to write this off as just another chess program but it isn't. CM9000 is a comprehensive chess experience with an excellent database, instructor, puzzles and the emphasis on short games makes for quite an addictive chess experience in that synaptic kind of way.

Jere Lawrence

RATING

FOR

- Ranking system makes for accessible games
- AI personalities that play differently
- A comprehensive chess experience and library

AGAINST

- Pieces don't battle it out
- Some 3D pieces are poorly modelled
- Has no compassion and can whoop you without remorse

OVERALL

A complete chess experience in every way

94

Delta Force 4

Can you fight back with a dagger up the jacksie?

DETAILS

DEVELOPER

Novalogic

PUBLISHER

Electronic Arts

DISTRIBUTOR

Electronic Arts

PRICE

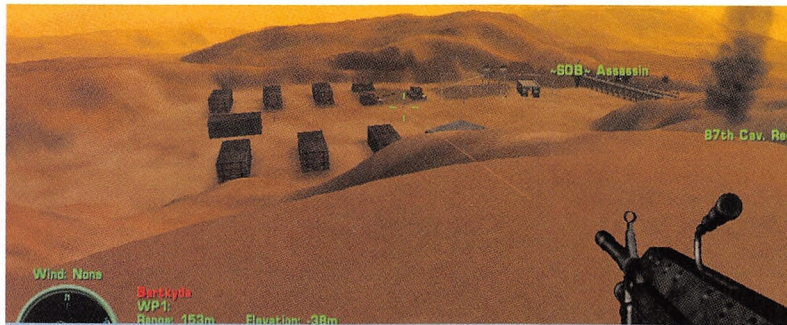
\$79.95

RATING

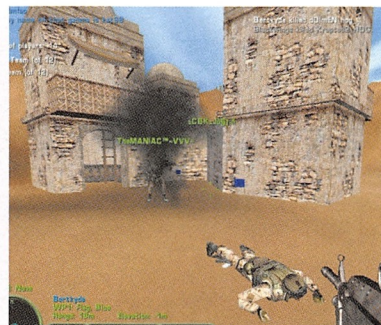
M

AVAILABLE

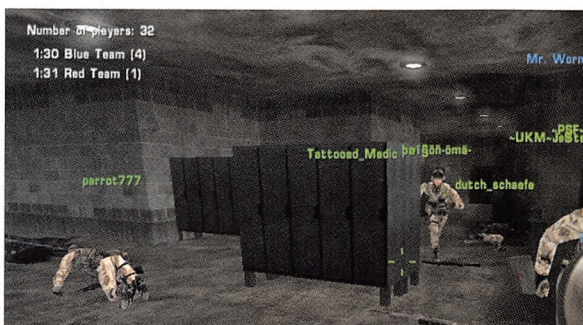
Now



Now to put an end to the foreign media and their pesky meddling



Hand over yer shoes and yer Raybans



...I don't know where we are... let's shoot stuff anyway!



Yes, that's definitely goat I smell

SYSTEM

NEED

P4 400
8MB Videocard
64MB RAM
200MB HDD

WANT

P4 1.6GHz
32MB Videocard
128MB RAM
300MB HDD

Back in the fifties the US government was deep in the throes of anti-communist paranoia. The Soviets were a hell of a lot closer to the oil fields of Arabia than the US was and the Yanks encouraged any and all kinds of anti-Soviet groups in the region to flourish. In the same skilful way that the US created the Viet Cong to secure their interests in Vietnam (no kidding), the US also organised and trained these groups of Islamic extremists. Then, to put the icing on the cake, the US kept a mass-murdering dictator in Iran for 25 years and drove that country's people into the

arms of their fundamentalist clerics. Now the dog has come back to bite its master and here in the form of Delta Force 4 is the game of the US government's response (The views of George Soropos etc, you know the drill by now - Ed).

Delta Force 4 revolves around the actions of the International Security Assistance Force and their efforts to bring the dreadful Taliban and Al-Qaeda to task over their terrorist attacks of September 11th. In the single- and multiplayer games you take part in operations as one of the 10 different Special Forces groups acting in this area of operations, including our own SASR. Hmm, so much for the Delta Force!

The first thing any Operation Flashpoint player will notice about Delta Force 4 is how far behind, in technological terms, the franchise has been left by its newer rival. Novalogic has stuck with its Voxelspace engine technology which the company has used since developing the original game. The reasons for using Voxels back then had to do with the rendering of wide-open spaces and the inability of Quake-style 'portal' engines to do this at the time.

The compromise was (and remains) the massive framerate hit when players

would move near or into a building. Buildings can't be made of Voxels so conventional polygon graphics are imposed over the Voxels causing big performance problems. It is almost unbelievable but Novalogic has never solved this problem and Delta Force 4 exhibits exactly the same behaviour. Go anywhere near, or worse, into a building and everything starts to get tired and emotional.

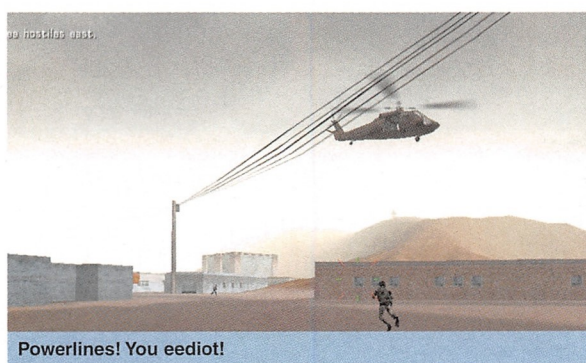
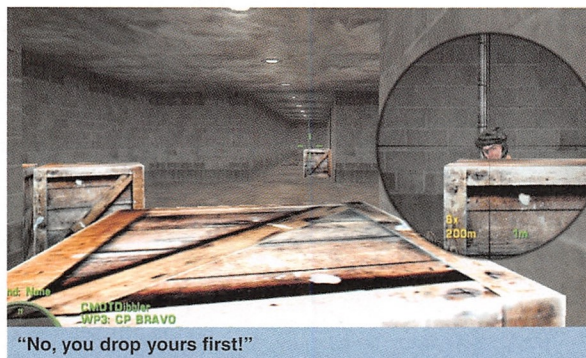
Gamers who've spent a small fortune on a GeForce4 or equivalent will be pleased to hear that Delta Force only supports resolutions up to 1024x768! Why? Well one of the wonderful and highly advanced features of Voxels is that they aren't very accelerated by 3D cards, if at all. In other words, if you replaced your GeForce4 with a TNT2 and ran the game, you would probably not notice any difference!

As you can see, the character models are quite primitive but what you can't see is how badly they are animated. The game uses few polygons, probably because of some issue with the Voxel based engine, resulting in tired graphics.

This is great for low-end machines but Delta Force looks like something from the pre 3Dfx era when compared to

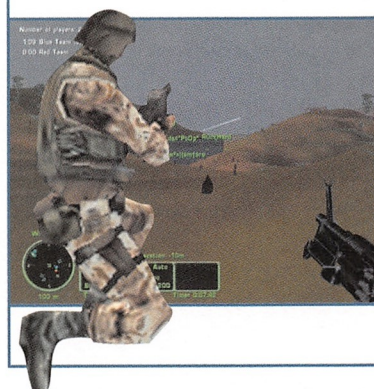
Mission Editor

Don't like the singleplayer game? Then why not design your own? For the first time ever, Delta Force 4 includes a mission editor. If you want to create some good multiplayer maps for LAN play or if you wish to set up your own server then it's never been easier. However the singleplayer game is so let down by the AI that it isn't really worth bothering with.



Multiplayer Maps

Novalogic's map designers have not been very creative or imaginative this time around and Delta Force 4's online maps are the duller yet. Gone are days of maps with rivers where you could lie in wait to knife an unsuspecting swimmer. Most of the new maps are small and place the teams far too close together for real warfare. These maps actually seem to encourage more FPS-like gameplay than simulation with their emphasis on instant action and therefore take something away from the uniqueness of the series.



looked pretty sick when they saw Operation Flashpoint for the first time; indeed those former Soviet developers have secured a US Marines contract to develop a multiplayer training system for their men! The bottom line is simply that the Delta Force series has failed to move with the times and is now too dated to be competitive.

George Soropos

OpFlash running on a high-end machine. Because of the strange nature of the game engine, the game never seems to run smoothly. Even when you drop the resolution down to 800x600 the 3D structures still make the game clunky when entered.

The singleplayer game has always been a very weak ally of Novalogic's online Delta Force experience and sadly Delta Force 4 is no exception. The heart of Delta Force's hopeless incompetence with singleplayer action is its dated AI routines that seem like they've been borrowed from Pong, circa 1976. It's very easy to get close enough to those terrorists to smell the goat on them without them reacting. Too easy in some cases where you can approach in full view and they don't so much as cough.

The singleplayer missions are also designed poorly and with little or no regard for realism or accuracy. For example, in one mission you are dropped right into the middle of a heavily defended enemy base in full view of the whole bloody joint! Special Forces one minute, target drone the next. There are a few new features in the singleplayer game such as your own private UAV to use as a spy and intelligence gatherer

and of course some new weapons such as the M60E3 machine gun and the silenced M4 but they don't make up for the game's rather dull overall feel. The player also has access to fixed gun emplacements for the first time in the series' history, similar to the M2 installations in Operation Flashpoint.

In every previous version these shortcomings were counterbalanced by the excellent multiplayer game included in the package and the free servers to play it on. If Operation Flashpoint had such a system (are you listening Codemasters?), Delta Force 4 wouldn't even be worth taking out of the shrink wrap. However Delta Force 4 is showing its age here as well.

There are some significant additions to the online game such as the combat medic character, an essential member of any strike team looking to oust their opponents from entrenched positions in the team games like King of the Hill and Attack and Defend. Another addition is the new Team Fortress-like limitations on the different classes. Gunners suffer less recoil from heavy machine-guns, Close Quarters Combat guys have a longer knife range etc.

The Novalogic team must have

RATING

FOR

- Low system spec
- Selection of weapons
- Free online gameplay

AGAINST

- Weak singleplayer
- OpFlash is streets ahead
- Some online cheating

OVERALL

Weak singleplayer and dated engine is saved somewhat by free online servers

75

Celtic Kings

Can you fight back with a dagger up the jacksie?

DETAILS

DEVELOPER

Haemimont Games

PUBLISHER

Red Ant

DISTRIBUTOR

Electronic Arts

PRICE

\$79.95

RATING

M15+

AVAILABLE

Now



If you're just going to piss-fart around we'll end the polo match right now



Oh Warrick, you're so butch



Romans Vs The Druids hockey semi-final



Well if you're so brave, YOU go in there then



Time to put on some
Rocky Music (Eye of the
Tiger ok? - Dep Ed)

SYSTEM

NEED

PII 400
64MB RAM
8MB Videocard
(1024x768)
427MB HDD

WANT

PIII 733 / Athlon
XP+
128MB RAM
32MB Videocard
427MB HDD

Celtic Kings is something of a hybrid which might appeal to those of you who like RTS efforts such as Warcraft while also being fans of lightweight RPGs like Diablo. The game has a strong exploration and combat vibe, but also lets you manage the odd base and engage in larger scale battles with troops you have recruited.

Old-fashioned smiting

Game features include a multiplayer element, full scripted adventure, skirmish mode and, best of all, it's a cinch to get into. In adventure mode you play a young Gallic hero called Larax. As Larax you were enjoying the high life with a lovely farm, lovely wife and no GST worries as you were living in the Middle Ages. Naturally, this idyllic situation is torn to shreds and in this case it is the Teutons who are to blame as the marauding hordes have killed your wife, destroyed your village and have been hinting that they might be implementing a new "consumer pays" taxation solution. Naturally, you are peeved beyond belief and decide it is time to appeal to your Goddess for unearthly powers so you can sally forth and do a whole lot of old fashioned smiting and administering of

justice with the stroke of a sword. The game then swings into motion with lots of smaller sub-quests and adventures as you gradually track down those evil Teutons. Luckily, you get a fair bit of support along the way as you save other tribes and gather a few allies.

The bloody Romans

Celtic Kings has a rambling and detailed narrative which eventually sees you battling the Roman Empire, but without the help of Asterix and his rather cuddly mate. Larax does develop during the course of the game and certainly you become a pretty fearsome warrior as you level up very fast and can eventually deal out massive amounts of damage. There are also special items you can pick up along the way and many different troop types you can recruit when you are lucky enough to have a base to use as an HQ. The game balances the single character stories where you are out in the wilderness with the more traditional RTS base-oriented elements reasonably well.

It's all about community

The economic model is pretty simple though and all you have to do is make sure

One innovative feature the game should have made more of is the way you can train units in the field by getting them to practice a bit of biffing amongst themselves. It actually looks quite slapstick but all it really achieves is to automatically level up your troops. Giving you the option to actively train your armies might have been a great idea if pushed further because it would have been intriguing to be able to determine the sorts of training your chaps did and what sorts of additional skills they developed. Sadly, this is something which never happened in Celtic Kings.

you can field a decent army by first growing your peasant population and increasing your gold and food stocks by gathering tribute from outlying villages.

There are technological upgrades and a host of different buildings which you use to improve your fighting skills or economy, however Celtic Kings doesn't have the world's most complex resource model and fans of the more traditional RTS will



This is why Firecracker Night was made illegal



Hey guys, quick! Larax is drunk in the karaoke bar again!



ALRIGHT, WHICH SMART-ARSE MADE THE ALL THE SADDLES OUT OF MAGNETS?

probably feel short-changed as there isn't a lot of depth on offer in this area.

There are a number of different troop types though, with archers and simple foot soldiers being your early options and later in the game, cavalry, specialised highly trained warriors and healers become available. This level of variety is good, but considering you can only field an army of 50 troops, it makes sense to hold out, defending your base until you can build the best troops, then go on the attack. This makes for some pretty simple strategies and you will find that the gameplay patterns quickly and isn't the most challenging in the world.

This would be fine if the character-based missions were full of lots of meat, but sadly this aspect of the gameplay is also too simple. Your character can carry a few items, but there is no means of determining the way your character develops. You level up automatically and there aren't enough special magic items to make the gameplay as interesting as it should be.

"I know this land!"

Visually Celtic Kings delivers reasonable levels of graphical detail while not being spectacular in any way. The traditional

top-down 2D sprite-based approach is explored with reasonable skill, even if some of the landscapes could have done with a little more variety and spicing up. It seems the developers, Haemimont, are pretty big fans of the colour brown as there are a lot of repetitive mud-coloured lands for you to explore. The characters are thankfully kinder on the eye, though there aren't as many frames of combat animation as perhaps there could be and the death animations are totally devoid of a corpuscle count and just look a little lame as a result.

The soundtrack is OK, even though the MIDI synthesised music feels rather out of date. The music is context-sensitive and doesn't get on the nerves too much, even after playing the game for some time. Sadly this cannot be said of the voiceovers, which lack variety and sound as if the developers themselves recorded a few very simple battle cries and decided to leave it at that. After hearing your hero proclaim that he "knows this land" for the hundredth time, you will be wishing that a little more effort had been expended in this department (or possibly a nice roll of duct tape to wrap around the hero's mouth - Dep Ed).

And in conclusion...

So all in all, Celtic Kings is a game which has a few flaws that might make it hard for those of us who love the two genres - RPG and RTS - to feel like there really is value. The hybrid idea at first looks good, but becomes an unworkable monster even Dr Frankenstein would be hard pushed to love at the end of the day.

Steve Polak

Half Baked

Haemimont is actually onto something with this game and all it would have needed is a bit more thought in a few areas and a little more depth. Funnily enough, while not raving about Celtic Kings, a sequel would help to examine how much further these guys from Bulgaria could have taken their ideas. Certainly, looking at similar hybrids like Kohan, it would be interesting to see how far Celtic Kings could go.



RATING

FOR

- You bash Romans
- There are some fresh ideas here
- Good narrative

AGAINST

- Audio is poor
- Strategy unsatisfyingly lite
- Map mode is rather awkward

OVERALL

Some great and interesting innovations which are let down by audio and visuals

70

Lego football Mania

Little plastic guys with plenty of balls

DETAILS

DEVELOPER
Lego Interactive
PUBLISHER
EA Sports
DISTRIBUTOR
Electronic Arts
PRICE
\$49.95
RATING
G
AVAILABLE
Now

SYSTEM

NEED

PIII 500
128MB RAM
16MB Videocard
6MB HDD

WANT

PIII/Athlon 1GHz
256MB RAM
32MB Videocard
6MB HDD

RATING

FOR

- Lots of amusing environments
- Well animated Lego people
- Simple fun

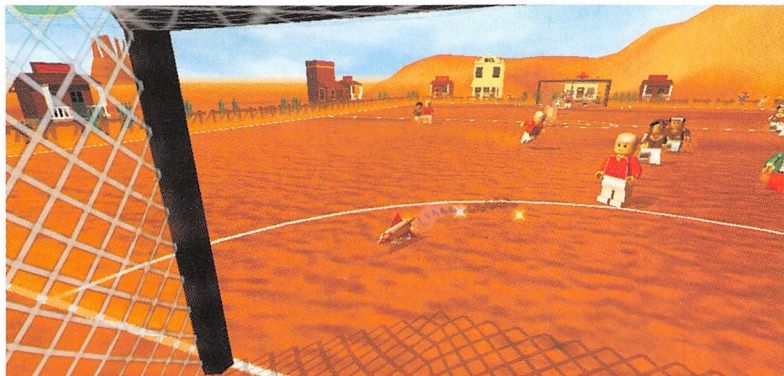
AGAINST

- Games can get repetitive
- Unlikely to have long-term appeal
- Gameplay is a little slow

OVERALL

Great for young players or for family fun. The simple console style controls make for a quick play-and-go experience

73



Diablo! Su madre usa cargadores del ejército! Su padre es un burro!



Largo Winch style

Show me someone that can

disassemble and reassemble something with minimum effort and I'll show you a kid that grew up with Lego. Who would have thought that little pieces of connectable plastic could be so much fun and so educational? Likewise, who could forget the utterly distinguishable and thoroughly unique little men and women from the world of Lego? Be afraid because Lego Interactive has brought them to life on our PCs and they're ready to dance, run and ride each other (I'll explain later) all over your screen in an arcade-style soccer game that's really quite entertaining.

It's hard to say where the future of gaming is going to go. With the divergence of console games and PC games which occurred in the mid-90s, it's great to see the return of simple and fun games for the PC. Football mania is definitely this. Basically, you control a team of Lego characters on themed soccer fields appropriate to your opposition. For example, if you compete against the Medieval Lego guys, the soccer match would occur in a Lego style castle. Play against the Space Lego and you go to the Moon or Mars. There's also the ubiquitous construction worker, pirate and cowboy Lego dudes among many others.

Power me up with homing balls

The game in itself is definitely quite entertaining in a console/young audience kind of way. It's your basic game of soccer with a twist in the form of power-ups. Scattered around the field are plentiful bonus items that can only be picked up by the player you're currently controlling. A necessary part of the play strategy to win at the game, only one



Matrix style

power-up can be held at a time. Power-ups include a speed boost that makes your player faster and a control reverser that confuses the opposition. Aggressive power-ups can turn the ball into an exploding bomb, stunning all players around it, or convert the ball into a homing missile towards the oppositions goal while another teleports the ball to an opposite team member - obviously a power-up that shouldn't be used when you're in possession.

The soccer match is fast-paced with numerous goals per game quite common. Controlling the ball is easy. When your Lego player is in possession, the ball sticks to you, keeping manoeuvrability simple. If however, you sprint with the ball, it loses its adhesiveness and becomes much more easily stolen. You can also take power shots, make a trick move to evade a tackling enemy or pass the ball to another player. The controls are very easy to use with keyboard equally as playable as with a gamepad.

Um, my Lego men are riding each other

Graphically, Lego Football Mania is standard 3D fare with nothing particularly exciting to write home about. At the very least, those with less than optimal system specs won't have any trouble running the game. The field is good, the Lego people look like real Lego people and the power-up effects are appropriate for power-up effects. Also amusing is that

with each goal, a celebratory 3D cut scene is played. Quite disturbingly, when the Cowboy Lego team scores a goal they tend to ride around on each other like horses. Actually it's really quite funny, both for the child who sees it as innocent fun and the adult who can make mock questioning glances. Sound is equally adequate. There are lots of bright, happy sound effects that you would expect from a title aimed at a younger audience and the musical score has an appropriate retro MIDI style soundtrack that's familiar to consolars.

In conclusion, Lego Football Mania is a simple, fun arcade/console style soccer game with eas-to-use controls and plenty of inoffensive cutesy content that is quite appealing to adults and children alike.

Jere Lawrence



Jere slaughtered Lego, a humiliating 8 to zilch.



DAMN YOU JERE WITH YOUR L33T SKILLS!

AVP2 Primal Hunt

New levels of terror or just more of the same?

DETAILS

DEVELOPER

Third Law

PUBLISHER

Sierra

DISTRIBUTOR

Vivendi

PRICE

\$49.95

RATING

MA15+

AVAILABLE

Now

SYSTEM

NEED

AVP2

PIII 667

64MB RAM

16MB Videocard

WANT

PIII 1GHz

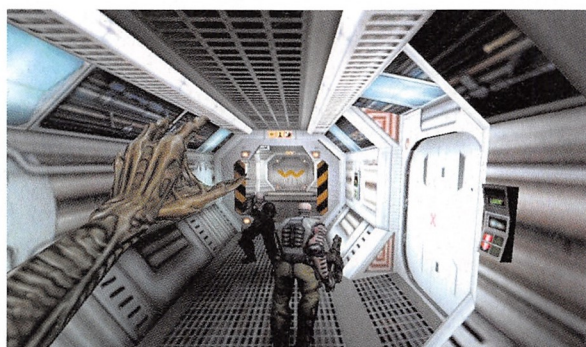
128MB RAM

32MB GeForce2

500MB HDD



"Dance ugly alien! Dance like our editor!"



"Tip, you're it."



The section of the map where you have to play charades to win

RATING

FOR

- New missions
- New weapons
- New multiplayer options

AGAINST

- Too short
- Lame new enemies
- No graphical enhancements

OVERALL

Solid but uninspired expansion that adds more to a great game

71

The interesting thing about *Primal Hunt* developers Third Law Interactive is that they were responsible for *KISS: Psycho Circus*, a game that came under a lot of criticism for being a *KISS* game that didn't have enough *KISS* in it. Thankfully, the developer has in fact included quite a lot of classic *Aliens vs Predator* action in this expansion pack for *Aliens vs Predator 2*.

The original game was soundly chastised by John Dewhurst for being far too short and *Primal Hunt* hardly makes much of an attempt to take the sting off this by only including nine missions, as opposed to the original's 21. This makes for one short-arse game, easily vanquished in fewer than 10 hours.

A brief word on the plot. Set variously 500 years before and kind of during the events of *AvP2*, a mysterious artefact with the power to control *Aliens* has been discovered by the *Predators*. Activation of the artefact locks a *Predator* in stasis for 500 years, until the artefact is deactivated by a slow-witted Russian marine named Dunya. And so this serves as the backdrop for a whole bunch of running and gunning, making use of the various different abilities of the three playable characters, flipping

switches and feeling ripped off that it's all over so quickly.

Naked and boxy!

Primal Hunt adds both new weapons and new enemies to the world of *AvP2* and the planet LV-1206. Firstly, there are three 'indigenous life forms' - a charging bull-like critter, a reptilian gorilla thing that has a lame camouflage ability, and an irritating worm that pops up out of the ground and seems either impossible to kill or maybe just has about a hundred different heads.

These new critters are actually more a detriment to the game rather than an addition as they seem completely lame compared to the *Aliens*, the *Predators* and the various human marines. Inside, in the hive, the action is tense and unique. Outside, in the bush, it's just another generic sci-fi shooter.

Speaking of shooting, there are a bunch of new weapons available. The *Alien* is now a *Predalien* - half *Predator* - which makes it a little slower but a lot tougher, like the *Predalien* available in multiplayer in the original *AvP2*. The *Predator* now has an energy flechette arm-mounted pistol, which works well and now also has the ability to self-destruct in multiplayer. You still lose a point for the suicide, but the blast is big enough to

potentially take out a whole bunch of opponents at once. Finally, the marine now has dual pistols and can deploy sentry guns. She also does a nudie shower scene at the beginning of the game, but since she looks like she's made out of pink tissue boxes, it's hardly worth getting the game for.

Spiced but still cold

A whole bunch of extra multiplayer options have also been added, including the ability to disable individual weapons and character classes.

Primal Hunt is one of those awkward games that's a bit hard to rate. On the one hand, it's kind of uninspiring since it only really just tweaks the original and adds a few more options. On the other hand, the tweaks are all sensible and really enhance the game, and hey, a bunch more missions should never be kicked out of bed, especially since the original was too short. All in all, as we so often say, if *Primal Hunt* was a free or even a \$10 download, then it would be worth tracking down with your enhanced motion sensor. But for the best part of \$50, like anyone who takes me on in multiplayer when I use the *Predalien*, it's probably going to leave you feeling a little gutted.

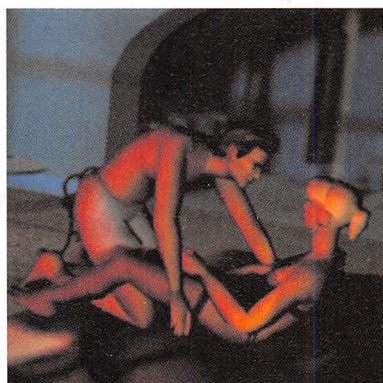
Justin Hoffman

Largo Winch

He's qualified to satisfy you



"So, uh, you been on the swinging scene long?"



Um, when a mummy and a daddy love...



(Clue: the swizzle stick is down her top)

Gaming and Hollywood agree on a lot of things. Both industries agree that might is right, that a big explosion is better than a little explosion, that cars burst into flame if shot twice with a low-calibre pistol, that tough heroes can get punched in the spine, fall down a flight of steps and then jump up and keep fighting. But there is one thing that gaming and Hollywood rarely seem to agree on and it has to do with the facts of life.

In Hollywood, it's common knowledge that if you meet a woman and subsequently kiss her you will immediately then proceed to have sex. In gaming however, if women appear at all they're as leather-clad gun-toting psychos who want to blow your brains out, or if they are by wild chance on your side, they are boxy, unattainable and probably little more than scenery. But the French have set out to change that.

Boob alert!

Enter Largo Winch, which at best can be said to be a 3D version of Leisure Suit Larry, except that as a game it takes itself completely seriously. Based on a successful French comic book and TV series, Largo Winch is a young man who

unexpectedly inherits a \$60 billion business empire. Naturally, an enterprise this size attracts more than its fair share of trouble and strife and so the possibility for Largo to embark on lots of lovely adventures is ripe.

The game opens at an expensive gala cocktail party where all the women have gigantic breasts and wear revealing gowns. Rushing quickly to the VIP gallery, Largo, a couple of his mates and a bevy of breasty babes are all locked in and sent aggressive SMS messages indicating that there is a BOMB! Largo solves some puzzles, escapes, walks one of the babes home, shags the hell out of her and then flies to Mexico, because a bunch of genetically modified wheat has been stolen from one of his food laboratories.

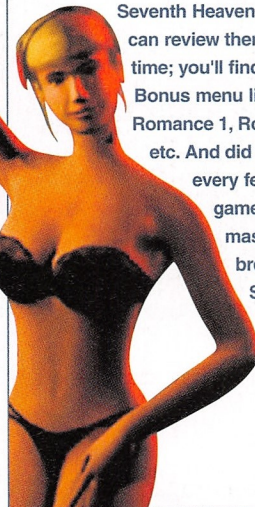
Lick the sauce off me!

Cheesy plot and vaguely sexist stylings aside, Largo Winch is sadly a rather basic adventure game. Each scene has only a few locations, only a few items and only one or two puzzles. Once Largo exits a location his inventory is cleared so the player always knows that the solution to any given problem is a

Enough of your love baby

The sex scenes are, depending on your attitude, either disappointingly coy or laughably gratuitous; the sex doesn't really reveal anything about any of the characters, you don't get to see any 'naughty bits' and after a while you realise that Largo is pretty much going to sleep with every woman in the game. The sex is depicted in a cut scene, where each female appears in alluring lingerie, offering herself to Largo. Unfortunately (or laughably) the characters are rendered in that particular 3D style that looks only vaguely human, with oddly elongated limbs, awkward joints and painted-on underwear, so the whole business is about as titillating as the love scenes in

Seventh Heaven. But you can review them at any time; you'll find them in the Bonus menu listed as Romance 1, Romance 2 etc. And did we mention every female in the game has massive breasts? Someone call Germaine.



maximum of three screens away. Not that these problems are particularly challenging to begin with; every collectible object will need to be used almost immediately on the next screen. Also, a handy PDA tells Largo exactly what he needs to do next. It's an excessively simple game, clearly hoping to ride on the popularity of the comic and TV series. Unfortunately most Australians will never have heard of either.

A decently detailed 3D engine and low system requirements cannot save this from mediocrity. With more eroticism, better character development or more action Largo Winch might have been a going concern, but as it stands the only folks this will appeal to are grotty little adolescents who will eagerly rush through the simplistic puzzles to get to the next poorly rendered sex scene.

Anthony Fordham

DETAILS

DEVELOPER

Anecy

PUBLISHER

Ubi Soft

DISTRIBUTOR

Ubi Soft

PRICE

\$79.95

RATING

M15+

AVAILABLE

Now

SYSTEM

NEED

Celeron 366
64MB RAM
16MB Videocard
500MB HDD

WANT

P3-667
128MB RAM
32MB GeForce2
500MB HDD

RATING

FOR

- 3D engine
- Low system spec
- Mature content

AGAINST

- Simplistic
- Offensively sexist
- Ultimately boring

OVERALL

In trying to bring 'mature content' to gaming, Largo Winch only succeeds in marginalising women and titillating adolescents

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DVD MOVIE STUDIO



Panasonic

Everything you need to create DVD movies

Pinnacle Systems, a worldwide leader in digital video, and Panasonic, a leader in DVD technology, jointly announce DVD Movie Studio, a complete PC upgrade solution for making DVD movies. Using DVD Movie Studio, users can create DVDs from their home movies that can be watched on the vast majority of consumer DVD players. Pinnacle Studio 7 allows you to capture and edit footage on your PC. Add titles, scene transitions, customise sound tracks and more. Pinnacle Express then burns the material to DVD or VCD, S-VCD or back to your DV camera. The Panasonic DVD-RAM/R burner can also be used to backup PC data, copy DVD media (subject or copyright) or simply watch DVD Movies.

Capture. Edit. Burn.

- Capture movies from your DV Camcorder via the supplied firewire card
- Edit scenes, add effects & titles
- Add DVD navigation buttons & chapters
- Burn to DVD on the Panasonic DVD-RAM/R drive
- Preserve and share your memories on DVD
- write and re-write data on DVD-RAM like hard drive (100,000 times)
- DVD Utilities and Region coding software included

Features include:

- Keep your movies digital transfer from DV to PC to DVD
- Ideal for DVD movie creation or for back up of PC data (up to 9.4GB on one disk)
- Transfer video footage from your DV camcorder via the supplied Firewire card
- Edit, add soundtracks titles, effects and extra features with Pinnacle Studio 7.
- Be assured of compatibility with DVD-R. The format approved by the DVD forum.
- DVD-RAM is like a hard drive. Drag and drop files from Windows Explorer (r)
- Create Music CD's, DVD-ROM's or simply archive and back up with Primo DVD.
- Watch DVD movies with Cyberlink Power DVD (included)
- Everything to get you started in DVD creation.

The bundle includes:

- DV/ Firewire™ Interface Card
- Pinnacle Studio 7 SE
- Pinnacle Express
- Panasonic DVD-R/RAM Burner
- Cyberlink Power DVD software (VR Support)
- Veritas Primo DVD data burning software
- 1x 4.7GB DVD-R disc, 1x 4.7GB DVD-RAM disc
- IDE Cable, Firewire™ Cable, Drive Mounting Screws
- Hardware Installation Manuals
- Online software guides.
- Region coding software
- DVD diagnostic tools and drivers



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DVD Burner
DVD-RAM/R DRIVE

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Centre
132600

Available at all leading retailers



Harvey Norman

INREVIEW HARDWARE

The perfect place for your peripheral proliferation

Vivé la revolution! It often seems that big advances in technology take far too long and then, when they finally arrive, are way too expensive. At first it was the CD burner and at \$1000 for a single speed (1x) drive, they were the domain of the wealthy. These days it's hard to find any serious PC user without a burner and after a rudimentary glance at the survey, the majority of you already own one or list it as a top priority purchase. Curiously, you, our readers would rather have a writable optical medium over a DVD ROM drive and risk missing all the extra goodness of our DVD issue.

Given the popularity of writable optical devices, this month's feature round-up is on the latest technology, DVD writers. Like their CD siblings, DVD writers are expensive now but as we should all know, will continue to drop in price. The writable media, which also presents its own lack of cost efficiency, will also become more affordable and the revolution will have come full circle once again - that is, until the next big thing that demands our attention.

It's also Asher's turn to cover this month's Tech feature and our pages are graced with his tips on optimising Windows XP. Tweakage - it's the calling card of the tech savvy and what separates us from that primitive lot known as users. How do you know if

you're tech savvy? Well you'd read PCPP of course.

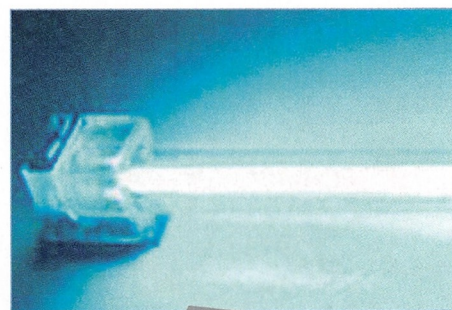
Placing some significant pressure on the G4 MX440, the ATi 9000 has arrived to finally bring a lot more credibility to the ATi product range and, more importantly, offer superior performance at a budget price. Sorry nVIDIA, but the days of the MX440 are pretty much over. Maybe next time they won't be so quick to re-badge an older product with a newer model number to try and catch consumers unaware.

A new arrival to the tech section and something a lot of you are showing a keen interest in is the addition of some case modding products. They're bright, colourful, easy to install, aesthetically pleasing and quite fun in that do-nothing-but-look-pretty kind of way. Sounds rather like the braindead TV personalities we have to regularly endure, doesn't it?

Completing our Tech line-up, we take a look at an Antec case, an MSI KT333 motherboard, the highly impressive Corsair 400MHz DDR memory as well as an ambidextrous joystick and a PDA.

Jere Lawrence
Deputy Editor
jerel@next.com.au

- 86** Windows XP Tweaking
- 90** DVD Writer Roundup
- 92** ATi 9000
- 93** KT Ultra 2
- 94** Antec Case
- 94** Cold Cathode Light LED Fan
- 95** X-micro Ti4600
- 95** Corsair 400MHz RAM
- 95** Saitek Joystick
- 95** Ipaq PDA



THE PCPP TECHNICAL AWARDS SYSTEM



The Power Award is given to the highest performing product in each PowerTest. We don't take into account the cost of the component or what extra functionality it might have. We just look for raw power.



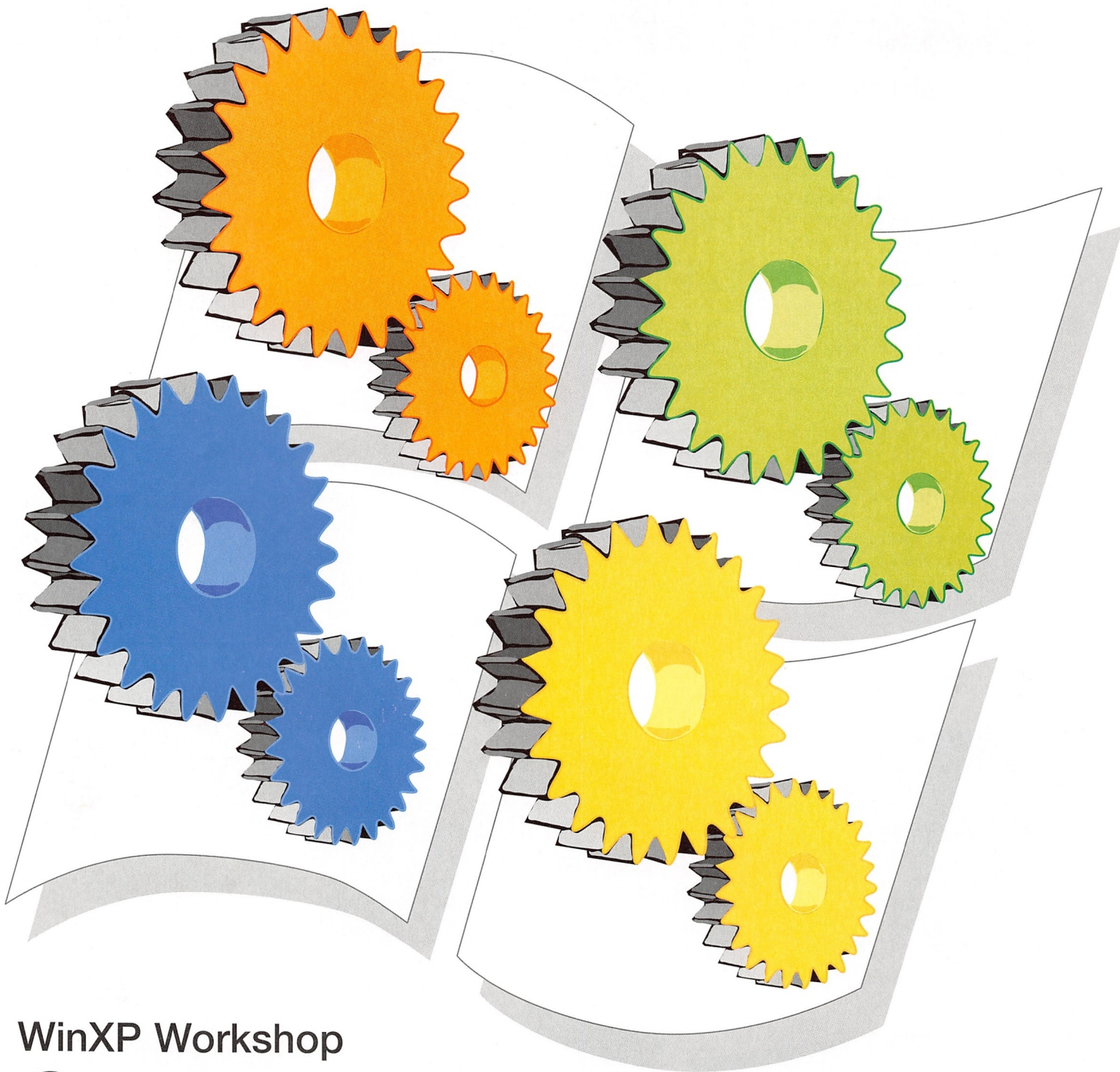
The Value Award is given in the PowerTest each month to the product that offers the best balance between performance and cost. It also takes into account any extras that come with the product.



In our definitive Hotware reviews, any product deemed revolutionary, of exemplary value or simply so cool it's a must-have, will receive a score above 90% and the coveted PC PowerPlay Gold award.

THE PCPP HARDWARE RATINGS SYSTEM

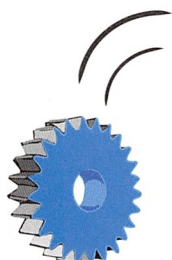
- 90+** Excellent, Gold Award. A must buy.
- 80-89** Worthy product, which is hard to fault. May be slightly lacking in extra features, value or performance.
- 60-79** Competent product, significantly behind the State of the Art.
- 40-59** Mediocre with little to recommend it.
- 0-39** A dog. Avoid.
- Distributor** The local point of contact for the product.
- Price** The RRP at the time of going to print.
- URL** Where to find further relevant information.



WinXP Workshop

Getting the most out of WindowsXP

* Contains obscure Hitchhikers Guide to the Galaxy reference.



So you've recently installed a fresh copy of Windows XP and are now in the final stages of packing your hard disk full of drivers, applications and games that have until now been left to gather dust amongst your trusty Voodoo Banshee and VFX headgear. Staring into your desktop, you ponder, "What shall I do next?" Many would immediately fire up a

game of Neverwinter Nights or Medal of Honor, however, if you're like me you'll first want to fully optimise your OS settings to ensure that your system is running as efficiently as possible. This can potentially be quite a daunting task, however, fear not as we will be with you every step of the way. Without further ado, let's get this show on the road.

Stress and nervous tension are very real problems when dealing with faulty operating systems. In addition to these helpful tips we also provide the following soothing images to promote healthy living and a calm mental state.



Soothing Image No. 8774



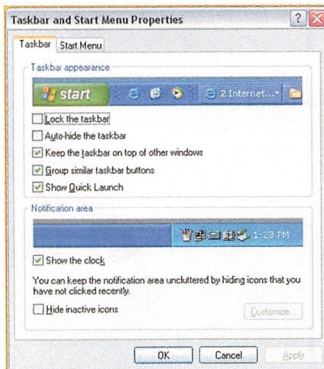
Soothing Image No. 2121



Soothing Image No. 3910

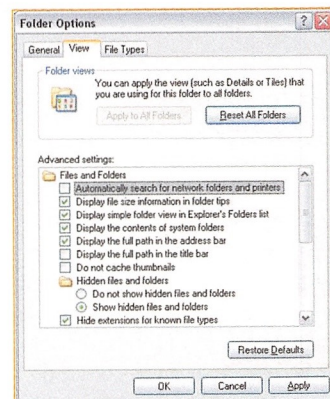
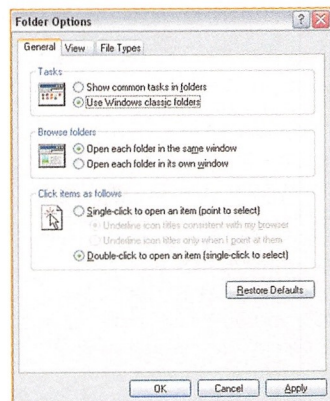
Taskbar and Folders

The first area of Windows XP you will probably want to customise is your taskbar and folders. To enter the "Taskbar and Start Menu Properties", right-click on the start menu and select "Properties". For the majority, optimal taskbar settings will differ from person to person, however, it is important that you uncheck the "Hide inactive icons" option. This ensures that programs do not load themselves into your system tray without you knowing about it.



Now go into your Control Panel. The first change that needs to be made is from the side frame. Under the Control Panel heading, select "Switch to Classic View" to make navigation easier. This won't make your machine faster but will be required in order to follow the guide. Next, open the "Folder Options" menu and click on the "General" tab. For optimal performance, make sure you select both the "Use classic Windows folders" and "Open each folder in the same windows" options. Moving onto the "View" tab, ensure you have the following options checked: "Display file size information in folder tips", "Display simple folder view in Explorer's Folders list", "Display the contents of system folders", "Show hidden files and folders", "Remember each folder's view settings", "Show encrypted or compressed NTFS files in colour", "Use Simplified File

Sharing". Also, make sure that the following options are unchecked: "Automatically search for network folders and printers", "Do not cache thumbnails", "Launch folder windows in a separate process" and "Show popup description for folder and desktop items". Doing so will ensure maximum performance during folder navigation.

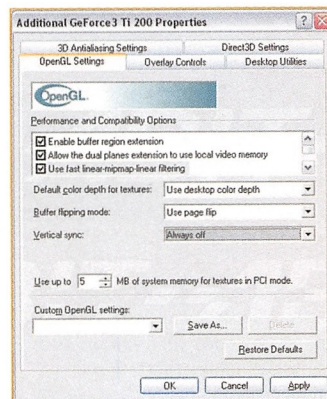


Display

The next and possibly most important area we will be looking at are the display properties. To enter this menu, right-click on the desktop and select "Properties". Now go to the "Settings" tab, click on the "Advanced" button and then the tab that corresponds with the

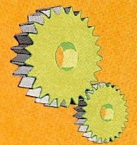
name of your graphics chipset (e.g. If your graphics card is based on the GeForce3 Ti200 chipset, the tab will be called "GeForce2 Ti200"). Next, click on the "Additional Properties" button that is located towards the bottom of the menu.

Once you are inside the Additional Properties menu, you will notice various tabs labelled "Direct3D Settings", "OpenGL Settings", "3D Antialiasing Settings" and so on. Each of these tabs features a variety of settings that can be adjusted for maximum performance or image quality, depending on what you require the most. For example, if you own a GeForce4 Ti4600 graphics card on an AMD AthlonXP 2100+ system, you will want better image quality over higher frame rates because your system would already be more than capable of running any current game, at any resolution, without breaking a sweat.



The OpenGL menu has quite a few relevant settings that shouldn't be overlooked. These include "Use fast linear-mipmap-linear filtering", "Buffer-flipping mode", "Vertical sync" and "Anisotropic Filtering".

"Use fast linear-mipmap-linear filtering" gives a slight increase in performance when enabled,



ClearType

ClearType is a new feature in WindowsXP that attempts to make text slightly easier to read. Traditional computer font rendering assumes that each pixel is either "on", appearing as a tiny individual black square, or "off". Some letters appear jagged on the computer screen because they are formed from many of these tiny squares. ClearType font technology improves upon this on/off choice by addressing the area beyond the traditional pixel boundary. This approach is the foundation of ClearType. Some users find ClearType to be a significant improvement, while others despise it. Either way, to enable this feature right-click on your desktop and select "Properties", click on the "Appearances" tab and then press the "Effects" button. Under the "Use the following method to smooth edges of screen fonts" pull-down menu, select "ClearType".

The popularity of laptops shows that people are eager to use mobile technology. Windows XP Professional is designed to make mobile computing easier. New features for mobile computing will help you accomplish as much on the road or at home as you do in the office, so you can be productive no matter where you are.

Black and White

The popularity of laptops shows that people are eager to use mobile technology. Windows XP Professional is designed to make mobile computing easier. New features for mobile computing will help you accomplish as much on the road or at home as you do in the office, so you can be productive no matter where you are.

ClearType



Soothing Image No. 6001



Soothing Image No. 7533



Soothing Image No. 4401

however, the trade-off is reduced image quality. Enable or disable this depending on your requirements.

Buffer-flipping is relevant to full-screen OpenGL applications. For optimal performance, set this to "page flipping" mode. If you experience any tearing or noticeable image distortion during gameplay, change it back to "Auto-select" mode.

Vertical sync or "VSync" forces the graphics card to render frames at the same speed as the monitor. When enabled, this usually results in lower frame rates and unless you experience tearing issues, leave this set to "Always Off".

Anisotropic filtering is a type of texture filtering separate and complimentary to bilinear/trilinear filtering. Put simply, anisotropic filtering makes textures that are

further away from you appear less blurry. While this results in a crisper, smoother image, it also gives a slight performance hit. Again, Enable or disable this option depending on your requirements.

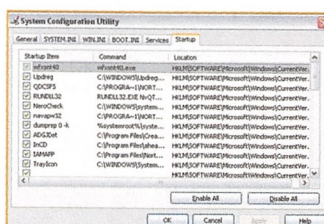
Now click the Direct3D tab. There is really only one option in this driver menu that will have an impact on performance. This option is "Mipmap detail level". Put simply, "Mipmap detail level" controls how well textures fit objects as they move further away. If you want a higher frame rate, set this to "Best performance". However, if you want slightly better image quality, set this to "Best image quality".



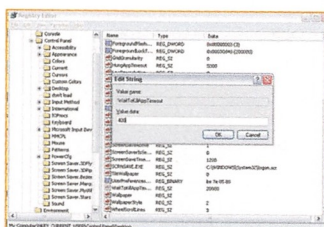
From Startup to Shutdown

There are a number of small customisations you can make to greatly improve your startup and shutdown times. MSConfig is a small utility built into Windows XP that allows you to customise a number of settings, including the programs that automatically open when Windows is loaded. To enter MSConfig, click on the Start menu, go to "Run" and type "msconfig". When the "System Configuration Utility" pops up, go to the "Startup" tab and you will see a list of programs that will be started when

Windows is loaded. Uncheck as many as is conveniently possible as the smaller the number of programs there is to load, the faster your boot time.



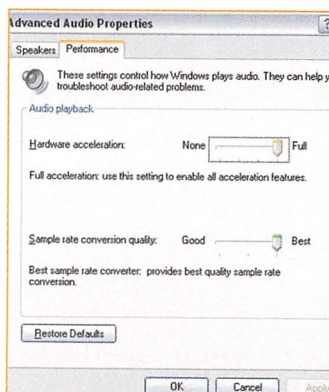
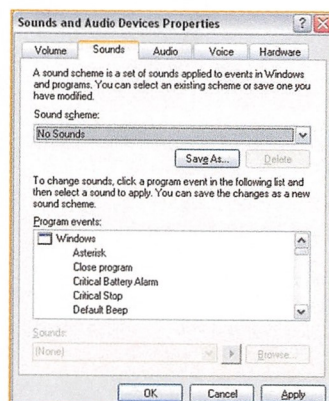
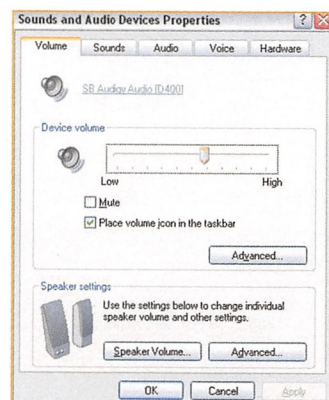
Shortening your shutdown time is a little bit trickier, as you will have to enter your system's registry. To do this, go to your Start menu, select "Run" and type in "regedit". Once inside, click on "HKEY_CURRENT_USER", then "Control Panel" and finally "Desktop". Now search for the "WaitToKillAppTimeout" entry. Change this setting from the default of 20000 all the way down to 4000 and click "Ok".



Audio

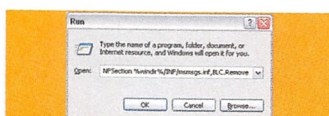
To access the sound properties, go into Control Panel and open "Sounds and Audio Devices". Volume settings should be adjusted according to taste, however, I recommend checking the "Place volume icon in the taskbar" option for quick adjustments. Under the "Sounds" tab, make sure that as many system sounds as possible are disabled in order to minimise memory usage. Next go into the "Audio" tab, click on

the "Advanced" button and then on the "Performance" tab. Make sure that "Hardware Acceleration" is set to "Full" and that "Sample Conversion" is set to "Best" for optimal performance.



Removing MSN Messenger

You may have noticed by now that MSN Messenger loads up every time you boot your PC and sits in your system tray whether you like it or not. For those who do not use the program, this can be quite frustrating indeed. However, you can quite simply remove MSN Messenger by going into your Start menu, selecting "Run" and pasting the following line into the box: "RunDll32 advpack.dll,LaunchINFSection %windir%\INF\mmsgs.inf,BLC.Remove"

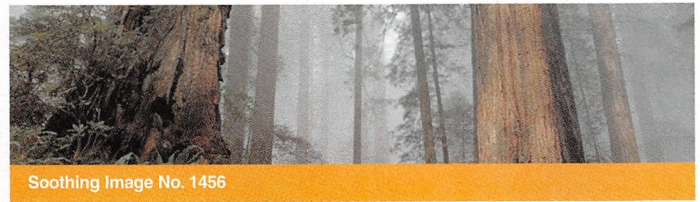




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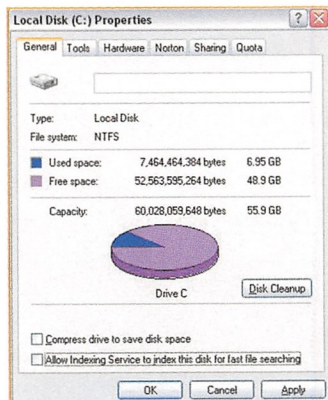
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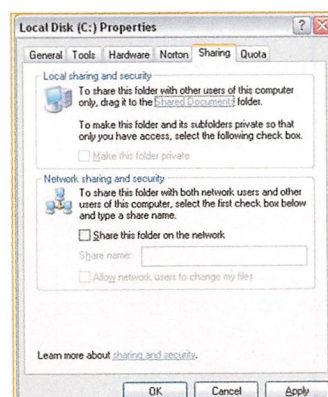
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Hard Disk & Memory

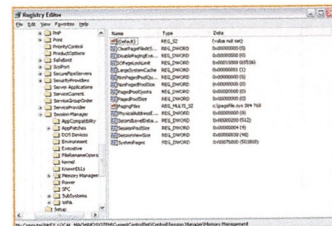
To enter your hard disk properties, go into "My Computer", right-click on the hard disk icon and select "Properties". Down the bottom of the window you should notice two options that can be checked or unchecked: "Compress drive to save disk space" and "Allow Indexing Service to index this disk for fast file searching". Make sure both of these are unchecked for optimal performance.



Moving into the "Sharing" tab, make sure that sharing on the drive is disabled unless you are part of a LAN and would like to share the drive contents with your networked PCs. This improves both performance and security.



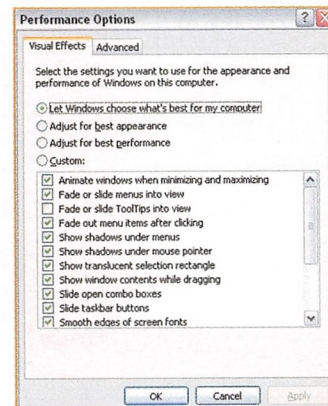
There are a number of small tweaks you can perform to improve your PC's memory performance. However, they all require entry into the registry, which is explained in the "From Startup to Shutdown" section. Once inside the registry, navigate to the "HKEY_LOCAL_MACHINE\SYSTEM\CurrentControlSet\Control\Session Manager\Memory Management" section. Firstly, find the "DisablePagingExecutive" entry and change its setting from "0" to "1". This stops Windows XP paging sections from RAM memory to the hard disk and thus increases performance. Next, find the "LargeSystemCache" entry and also set it from "0" to "1". This allocates all but 4MB of RAM to the file system cache, where the leftover 4MB is used for disk caching. Again, when applied, this tweak should significantly increase performance.



Performance Options

The "Performance Options" menu allows you to customise your system depending on whether you want to increase its visual appearance or improve performance. Start by right-clicking "My Computer" and selecting "Properties". Click on the "Advanced" tab and press the "Settings" button under the "Performance" heading. You can either let Windows choose the best settings for your computer, adjust for best appearance, adjust for best performance or customise

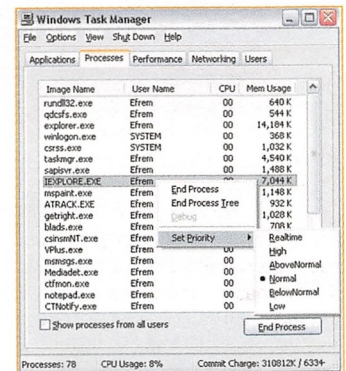
each option manually. If you are running on an older system or a system with a low amount of RAM or an underpowered videocard, or if you primarily use your PC as a gaming system, you should go with "Best Performance". If you have a fast system with plenty of RAM and a good videocard, you might consider "Best Appearance" instead. Alternatively, you can simply click the "Custom" option and experiment manually with each setting until you tweak it to your own preference and balance performance with visual effects to your own liking.



Prioritising Processes

The final area of Windows XP that we will be customising is the prioritising of individual processes. Firstly, press Ctrl-Alt-Del, which should bring up the "Windows Task Manager". From here, click the "Processes" tab and this will give you a list of all the processes you currently have running. Some of these processes you will regard as being of greater importance than others and you can conveniently prioritise them accordingly. Right-click on each of the processes you would like to modify, go down to "Set Priority" and choose either "Realtime", "High", "AboveNormal",

"Normal", "BelowNormal" or "Low". This will allow you to increase performance in the applications that you regularly use.



Summing It Up

This concludes PCPP's guide to tweaking Windows XP. Feel free to play around and marvel at the significant increases in both performance and/or visual appearance and stay tuned for more informative tech features each and every month.

Asher Moses



NTFS or FAT32?

When you were installing Windows XP you should have been given a choice of whether to format with the FAT32 or NTFS file system. If you chose NTFS, you are in luck because it is both faster and more secure than FAT32. However, if you are currently using the FAT32 file system you can quite easily convert to NTFS by going to your Start menu, selecting "Run" and entering "Convert C: /FS:NTFS". This is not a short process, but it is well worth the effort.

DVD WRITERS

After the legacy of 1.44MB disks, the 660MB capacity of a CD seemed like more space than we'd ever be able to use. Scroll forward to the year 2002 and once again we find ourselves short of storage with a stack of writable CDs ominously towering over us, threatening to fall and bury our collective selves under a sea of shiny gold and silver platters. With eight times the storage of a conventional CD, Stuart Calvin, our optical specialist, has tested the latest DVD writers to inform you of the one most worthy of your hard earned dollars. 4.7GB per disc - Wootage!

AOpen DVRW2412Pro

Price:
\$799
Distributor:
bluechipIT
URL:
servex.com.au
Phone:
02 8745 8400
Score:

93

A wide range of supported CD formats rounds out the package to make for a truly versatile, all-in-one, combination unit. An impressive drive that is fully recommended.

AOpen has chosen a 2.4x +RW/+R drive as their flagship unit. It can also write to CD-R/RW at 12x/10x, read a CD at 32x and read a DVD at 8x. It wrote the compilation from lead-in to lead-out in 12':34", about a minute slower than the Ricoh. It's easy to install and comes with an impressive range of software to do just about anything. It supports high-speed and background formatting of +RW discs which makes it a breeze to re-use any coasters or quickly get on with the job. They can also be played in many set-top DVD units. The anti-coaster technology is Just Link by Ricoh with a write-gap of only two microns for added reliability.



Testing

Six drives were tested on a 933MHz PIII with Win98SE and WinXP Pro using an 815EPT Pro-R (MS-6337 Ver5.0) with 512MB of PC133 RAM and ATA100 discs. The five IDE/ATAPI DVD writers were installed, as was the FireWire Lacie connected via a PCI adaptor. All devices ran together without any problems. The write tests involved packet writing and burning a 2,048MB Nero compilation of audio, data and video files in a directory structure and then reading it all back to disc.

Ricoh's latest DVD +RW/+R writer is an excellent package of reading and writing ability supported by an outstanding software bundle. This model adds +R compatibility to proven +RW ability. The MP5120A was the second fastest writer after the Sony at 11':26" for 2GB of data and 35 seconds for a format. Simple installation, trouble free operation and the ability to 'do-it-all' makes this drive particularly attractive to purchasers. It too, can also write to CD-R/RW at 12x/10x, read a CD at 32x and read a DVD at 8x. The combination of Just Link and Lossless Linking technologies makes for high reliability when backing up precious data or trusting home video to disc. Ricoh provided the most software, which includes CD/DVD mastering, video editing, packet writing, video creating, video playback applications and a clip collection feature for movies.

Ricoh MP5125A

Price:
\$899
Distributor:
Ricoh
URL:
ricoh.com.au
Phone:
1300 666 383
Score:

97

A wide range of CD formats are also supported that make this unit highly recommendable. This drive is the winner.



Lacie DVD-R/RW

Price:
\$1099
Distributor:
Lacie
URL:
lacie.com.au
Phone:
02 9669 6900
Score:

88

FireWire is excellent technology and if portability is your need then this drive and its software is worth a look.



The Lacie is an external unit that connects via FireWire or USB 2.0. The IEEE-394 bus makes the drive hot-pluggable so it can be moved from PC to PC without having to shutdown or reboot. Incorporating a Pioneer DVR-A04 drive, it can also perform a limited range of CD-R/RW write modes. It comes with a range of software including Toast for Apple computer variants. The drive is a DVD Forum standard unit meaning that it writes to DVD-R and -RW but can only achieve 2x -R and 1x -RW speeds. Write speed testing was nearly meaningless as the lead-out and close session times were exceedingly lengthy which can be frustrating.

with Stuart Calvin

Panasonic DVD-RAM/R D321E

Price:
\$880
Distributor:
Panasonic
URL:
panasonic.com.au
Phone:
132 600
Score:

89

If you're prepared to bet on RAM/R winning the DVD standards battle then by all means this is a worthwhile investment.

There were some difficulties to be had with the D321E that involved having to immerse oneself in the documentation a little too often. I enjoyed using the packet writing features of the caddy RAM disk which has the drive functioning more like a second HDD with its ability to write data at 40MB/sec. There was however, a problem with a CD coastering after a failed DVD-R burn attempt and at \$22 per blank disc, this can hurt. A 1MB buffer and slower write speeds detracts from what should otherwise be a prized unit from Matsushita.



Unlike CD-RW drives, which took years to move up to 2x, 4x and faster burn rates, fast DVD writers began appearing in their first year. While the 1x rate of CDs is 150 KB/s, the 1x rate of a DVD is nine times faster at 1.32 MB/s. Most DVD 'plus' writers are 2.4x burners, equivalent to a 22x CD rate - not slow, not fast, but OK. DVD-R is currently at 2x speed technology.

Formats

The "+RW" format, also known as DVD+RW is not the DVD Forum format. Limited models of DVD-ROM drives and DVD-video players may not read DVD+RW discs. The approved recordable formats are DVD-R, DVD-RW and DVD-RAM. The rule of thumb with DVD writing technology is that all write-once discs can be read most anywhere but not all rewriteable discs can be read everywhere. Careful consideration of formats and their use is fundamental to the enjoyment of this technology.



Panasonic DVD Movie Studio

Price:
\$980
Distributor:
Panasonic
URL:
panasonic.com.au
Phone:
132 600
Score:

90

With Panasonic's approach to this package, it will suit many home users of digital video.

This LF-D311SC RAM/R unit is a 'movie package in a box'. Everything you need and a little more is included to make it happen. The RAM disk which acts like a magneto optical drive is not as versatile as the +RW format since the disk is enclosed in a caddy and is only compatible with another RAM drive. This is a problem if you commit digital video to a caddy RAM disk but not DVD-R. Be aware that this Panasonic drive cannot write to CD media so look at a D321E if you want an all-in-one combo writer.

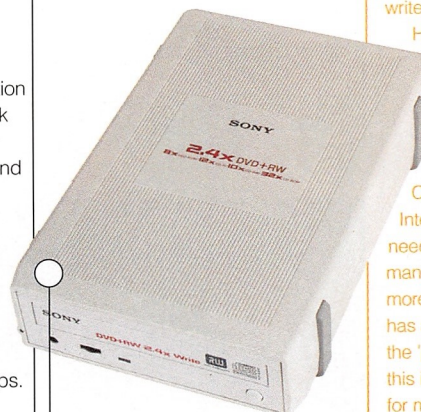
Sony DVD+RW

Price:
\$899
Distributor:
Sony
URL:
sony.com.au
Phone:
1300 137 669
Score:

89

If the vendors want this terrific product to take off then the package has to be complete. I'd still buy the Sony but I'd compare software very carefully.

The DRU-120A provides for good performance all round with quick DVD+RW formatting and a writing time comparable to the Ricoh at 11':20". It also writes to CD-R/RW media but the sub-par documentation and inferior software made me think twice about the package. The only real difference between the Sony and the other +RW drives are the retail box contents. I expect that most consumers will want to plug/load it all in and just do it. Without a complete software package included, if you're not careful then you can spend extra to watch a movie, author your own or store clips.



Summary

If you're just after data backup then any of these writers will do the job.

However, there is some devil in the detail of the 'extras', so if you're after some particular feature like home movies, Photo-CD, CD-Extra or CD-Interactive, then you'll need to visit the manufacturer's web site for more information. Microsoft has announced support for the 'plus' technology and this is where I'll be looking for my purchase.

ATI Hercules 3D Prophet 9000



ATI caught us off guard with the recent release of two new graphics chipsets, the Radeon 9700 and the Radeon 9000. As you can probably tell from ATI's naming scheme, the R9700 has been directed at high-end gamers, while the R9000 is targeting the value segment. The first of the two chipsets to hit our labs is the R9000-based Hercules 3D Prophet 9000.

Fancy technology

The Radeon 9000 chipset features four pixel pipelines that are capable of processing two textures per pipe and six textures per pass. Furthermore, the chipset features programmable vertex shaders 1.1 as well as programmable pixel shaders 1.4, making it fully DirectX 8.1 compliant.

In usual ATI style, multiple monitor support is available as well as an inbuilt TV-out chip supporting resolutions of up to 1024x768. ATI chipsets are renowned for their superb TV-out image quality and the R9000 is certainly no exception. During testing it produced a clear, crisp image that was well above our expectations of a budget card.

Another interesting feature the R9000 boasts is its video de-blocking abilities that ATI has dubbed "FullStream". FullStream gives the chipset the ability to run pixel shader programs on video streams, resulting in a much cleaner, less blocky image. This is quite an impressive addition and will help smooth out blocky compression artefacts that commonly plague low bandwidth video.

ATI's SmoothVision technology provides full-scene anti-aliasing support with sampling rates of 2x, 3x, 4x, 5x and 6x. Its performance in terms of raw frame rate was similar to that of the GeForce4 MX440, however, the real advantage lies in its image quality. The R9000's FSAA image quality was far superior to that of our GeForce4 MX440 and Xabre 400 cards, producing a sharper, cleaner image.

The card

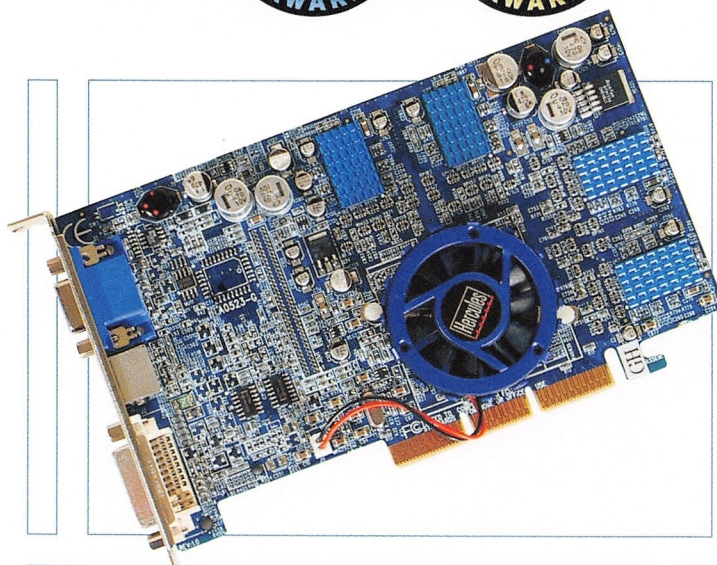
Moving on to the card itself, the Hercules 3D Prophet 9000 boasts 128MB of DDR memory running at 275MHz (550MHz effective) as well as a core clock speed of 275MHz and both DVI and TV outputs and

the standard AGP transfer rate of 4x. We tested the card on a Pentium 4 2GHz-based system running on an Abit IT7 motherboard as well as 256MB PC2700 memory. In 3DMark2001 SE the Radeon 9000 managed to outperform both the GeForce4 MX440 and SiS Xabre 400 chipsets by quite a significant margin. However, in Quake 3 Arena the results proved to be much closer than originally expected. This is most likely due to the fact that the R9000's superior vertex and pixel shading capabilities give it a massive performance advantage in DirectX 8 applications.

Conclusion

Overall, we were very impressed with the Hercules 3D Prophet 9000. Couple its bargain price of around \$260 with excellent performance, plenty of features and full DirectX 8.1 compliance and you really can't go wrong. If you are on a budget and looking to upgrade your graphics card in the near future it would be prudent to include the Hercules 3D Prophet 9000 on your shortlist.

Asher Moses



Quake 3 Arena - 1024x768 32bit Results

Hercules 3D Prophet 9000	135
Abit Ti4200	131.2
Abit Ti4200	129

3DMark2001 SE - 1024x768 32bit Results

Hercules 3D Prophet 9000	6612
Abit Ti4200	5754
Abit Ti42	4895

	Radeon 9000	Xabre 400	GF4 MX440
Codename	R250	Xabre 400	NV17
Core Clock	275Mhz	250MHz	270MHz
Memory Clock	275MHz DDR	250MHz DDR	200MHz DDR
Memory Amount	64/128MB	64/128MB	64/128MB
Memory Type	DDR	DDR	DDR
Memory Bandwidth	8.8GB/sec	8GB/sec	6.4GB/sec
Memory Bus	128bit	64/128bit	128bit
Pixel Shaders	Yes	Yes	No
Vertex Shaders	Yes	No	No
T&L	Yes	Yes	Yes
AGP Transfer Rate	4x	8x	4x

Excellent performance and plenty of features coupled with a low price.

Price: \$260
Distributor: Hercules
URL: www.hercules.com.au
Phone: 02 8303 1818

SCORE

095

Antec

Plus 660AMG Case

Once upon a time selecting a case was easy. There were mid- and tower-sized configurations with a comprehensive choice of colours that consisted of beige, beige and light beige. These days however, cases are becoming literal fashion statements with prominent colours, differing metal types and even some innovative features.

The Antec 660AMG comes in two different colours. There's beige (what a surprise) and metallic charcoal grey. Standing 480mm long, 410mm high and 200mm wide, the metal is quite solid and reassuringly heavy with nice rounded edges and offers a comfortable amount of room to work with inside. Aiding this is that the internal 3.5" bay that can hold up to three 3.5" devices, such as HDDs which can be easily removed and re-installed with the flick of a lever, superseding the need for screws.

Above the removable 3.5" bay, there are three 5.25" drive bays and two 3.5" bays. Actually, there are four 5.25" slots available but the fourth slot has a 3.5" bracket in place for two devices that can quickly become a spare 5.25" bay. Located inside the case are convenient brackets for

installing 5.25" devices that simply screw onto the unit and then click into the bay with removal as easy as pressing the release catch. The front panel also features two USB and one firewire port with well labelled internal leads for connection to your motherboard.

The 330w power supply features the standard motherboard (ATX and P4) plugs plus four power leads. One lead with three 5.25" plugs, two leads with two 5.25" and one 3.5" plug as well as a lead with two fan-only 5.25" plugs.

Cooling has been a major consideration for Antec and the 660AMG comes with two internal fans - one rear mounted and another located on the side door - plus a spare unused front grill with bracket for a standard 80mm fan. This was perhaps the main anomaly of the case as the side panel that features the fan also has a handle that can be used for easy access. This means that whenever opening it up, the fan needs to be disconnected. Another problem was that the handle, which is only held in place with some flimsy plastic, fell off on two occasions.

Jere Lawrence



Good to work with and solid construction but side-mounted fan can be intrusive and the handle fell off one too many times for my liking.

Price: \$180

Distributor: Altech

URL: www.altech.com.au

Phone: 02 9748 2233

SCORE

077

MSI KT Ultra 2

MSI's latest offering to the world of motherboards, the KT Ultra 2, is easy to install, highly configurable and comes with a plethora of overclocking options.

The feature set of the board includes support for Socket A (Socket 462) for Athlon XP/ Duron processors with full support for the new 1.8GHz XP 2200+. Utilising the Via KT333 chipset, the Ultra 2 features a sporty FSB of 200/266MHz, five PCI slots with support for 3.3v/5v devices, one CNR slot and an integrated AC'97 sound card with six-channel audio plus provided bracket for SP/DIF out. The on-board VIA VT8235 chipset includes support for dual channel Ultra DMA at 33/66/100/133 and a master mode EIDE controller that allows for ATA 66/100/133 drives to be run on a raid controller at 200 MB/sec.

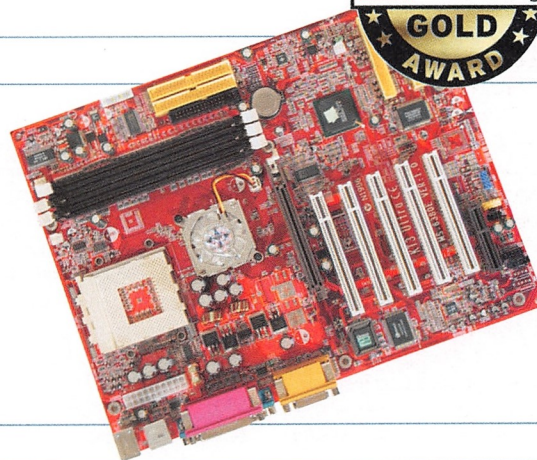
There's the ubiquitous 4x AGP controller, two USB ports and support for 184-pin DDR DIMMs for up to 3GB of DDR200/266/333 SDRAM modules. Interfaces and ports include: one floppy, two serial, one parallel, one IrDA connector for infrared devices, two IDE, two EIDE for RAID and one game port. The board can also

support six USB 2.0 ports. There are two built-in rear ports, two additional ports mounted on an installable rear bracket and two remaining for connection to cases with USB ports.

Using the latest AMIBIOS, the KT Ultra 2 allows for the overclocking of the FSB, memory (handy if you want to use the latest 400MHz Corsair memory), CPU clock multiplier and DDR voltage. The big bonus for overclockers is the inclusion of a piece of software by MSI called Fuzzy Logic 4 which allows you to modify all the previously listed BIOS modifications within Windows so you can tweak and overclock without having to reboot every time. The neatest function is that it has an Auto mode where it will automatically test and increase the speed of the board in small increments until a crash occurs. Once your machine is rebooted, the app throttles back to the last stable setting and your auto overclocking is complete.

Although the performance of the board fell just short of the Abit AT7 the ease with which this board can be overclocked will allow users to receive optimal performance out of it.

Jere Lawrence



SiSoft Sandra 2002 - CPU Benchmark

MSI KT Ultra 2 ALU	4107
MSI KT Ultra 2 FPU	2057
Abit AT7 ALU	4191
Abit AT7 FPU	2098

A highly tweakable motherboard with a thoroughly usable set of included utilities that make this board a worthy purchase.

Price: \$231

Distributor: Aus PC Market

URL: www.auspcmarket.com.au

Phone: 02 9817 2899

SCORE

090

PC Casegear Blue Cold Cathode light

Case modding, I will confess, is not something that I've placed a lot of value on and considered it purely the domain of PC owners undergoing some kind of twisted iMac envy. Besides, don't we as gamers have more important things to do, such as playing more games? Given the popularity of case modding however, it would seem that a gamer's desire for eye-candy goes beyond just the pixels on our monitors.

After playing with, or more accurately, observing the little blue CC tube for a couple of weeks, I think I finally get it. There's a certain aesthetic charm to it in an aquarium-watching kind of way as the luminescent glow from the tube emanates with a pleasant radiance that does indeed make your PC more attractive, particularly in a dark room.

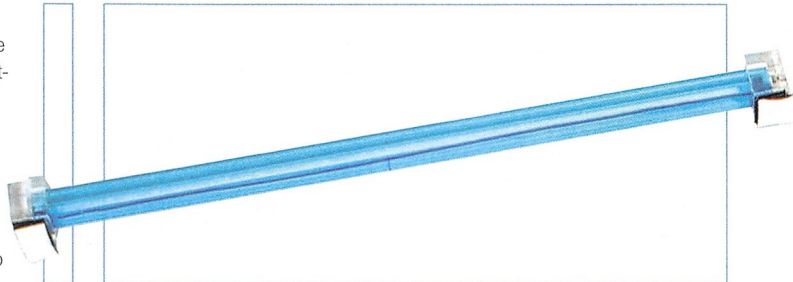
For a little blue light, there's actually a legitimate level of functionality. Primarily around a small electro luminance (EL) driver that allows for the CC tube to be turned off, on or set to flash. The flash mode is actually quite interesting because inside the module is a small microphone that, when a loud

enough sound occurs, will flash the light appropriately. As the impedance of the mic can be set with a small flat-headed screw driver, it's possible to tweak your light so that it flashes at particularly loud noises such as explosions or the bass line of your favourite CD.

A significant factor in the acceptability of case modding has to be in regard to ease of installation and to this end the caselight is very easy to install. Just place the self-sticking Velcro pieces inside your case where you want the tube to feature, then plug the standard 12v HDD connector into a spare plug on your PSU. The EL driver and additional power transformer also feature the same adhesive Velcro as the light and the EL switch can be disconnected from the 12v plug via a 2-pin connector, allowing for the plug to be located externally for easy access to the switch.

Case modding - it's not as superfluous as it might seem and given how easy it is to install and at a price of only \$48 makes for quite a pleasant aesthetic upgrade to your PC.

Jere Lawrence



Extremely easy to install and with adhesive Velcro on every major component is also conveniently neat. Visually pleasing to boot.

SCORE

Price: \$48

Distributor: PC Case Gear

URL: www.pccasegear.com.au

Phone: 03 9568 0932

087

Antec LED case fan

More than ever in the world of PCs, heat is becoming quite a considerable issue and numerous devices are contributing to this build up - not, as many think, just the processor. Hard disks running at many thousand RPMs produce their fair share of temperature (particularly if more than one hard drive is installed within 5mm of the other) along with your memory and the motherboards bus/memory/AGP/IO controller. The result of all this heat in an enclosed system can raise the overall temperature by about five degrees, sometimes more.

The solution to this is to install ventilation fans inside your PC. Two work best - one to suck air in and another to blow air out. Most modern ATX cases (even budget ones) should feature two grills where case fans can be installed so the majority of you shouldn't need to do any kind of filing or cutting.

Installing the fan is quite easy. It's simply a matter of locating the vents inside your PC and then

using the four self-tapping screws to mount it. Note: as the fan uses self-tappers, over-utilisation of the screws (i.e. screwing them in and out over and over) will weaken the fan's casing. Once mounted though, the fan need only be plugged into a 12v spare port on your PSU.

These Antec fans however, are not your common garden variety spin-round-real-fast make-cool-air type. No, these are spin-round-real-fast make-cool-air devices with pretty LEDs in them. For your viewing pleasure, there are four LED iterations to choose from. Straight blue, red and green, as well as a fan that features all three, making for a pleasant multi-coloured effect.

In a nutshell, this fan is a device for those into case modding or a case mod dabbler. The effect, although unnecessary for the smooth operation of your system, is still quite pretty and adds a pleasant dimension to PCs.

Jere Lawrence



Easy to install and highly aesthetically pleasing. Will actually ventilate your machine, so useful too.

SCORE

Price: \$40

Distributor: Altech

URL: www.altech.com.au

Phone: 02 9748 2233

089

X-Micro Ti4600

Rounding off our coverage of Ti4600-based graphics cards is the X-Micro Impact Ti4600, featuring awesome performance, stunning image quality, a DVI-output, a TV-output and VIVO support (Video In/Video Out). Considering the fact that this is the first VIVO-equipped Ti4600 to grace these pages, allow me to tell you a little more about its capabilities. Firstly, the card supports capture resolutions of up to 1024x768 and setup is as simple as connecting an RCA cable from your PC to a nearby VCR. Although blocky at times, image quality is superb and certainly ranks up there with the best we've seen.

X-Micro has bundled quite a few accessories with the card. These include: a detailed user's manual, a driver CD, two full version games (Codename: Outbreak and Ballistics), a registered version of WinDVR, a TV-out cable and a three-way S-Video splitter cable for VIVO functionality.

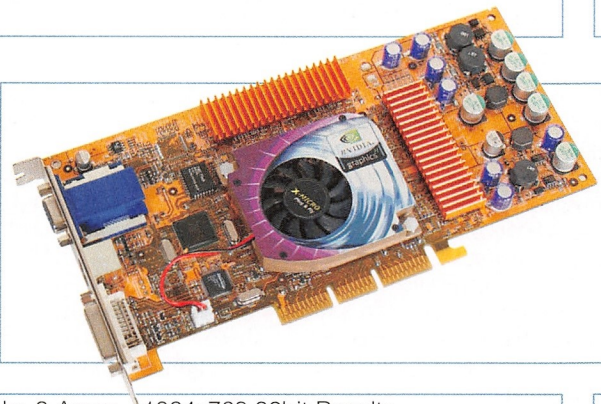
We tested the card using Quake 3 Arena and 3DMark2001 SE on a Pentium 4 2GHz-based test system running an Abit IT7 motherboard as well as 256MB PC2700 DDR

memory. As you can see, the card's performance is nothing short of amazing. As we expected, the Ti4600 outperformed the Ti4200 by quite a significant margin in all benchmarks performed.

As far as overclocking goes, we managed to wind the core clock speed up to 325MHz (from a 300MHz default) and the memory clock up to 700MHz (from a 650MHz default). This is not a massive achievement, however it is similar to what we have seen from various other Ti4600 cards currently on the market.

At the time of writing this review, the X-Micro Impact Ti4600 was priced at around \$680, which certainly isn't cheap considering that you can purchase a Ti4200 now for less than \$380. However, with the ATI R9700 Pro set to hit store shelves any day now, you can expect even further price cuts on the whole GeForce4 range. Overall, if you are looking for a high performing, feature-rich graphics card and have a fair bit of money to spend, the X-Micro Impact Ti4600 may be just what the doctor ordered.

Asher Moses



Quake 3 Arena - 1024x768 32bit Results

X-Micro Ti4600						89.5
Abit Ti4200						43.8
00	20	40	60	80	100	

3DMark2001 SE - 1024x768 32bit Results

X-Micro Ti4600					7892
Abit Ti4200					6362
00	1000	3000	5000	7000	9000

High performing and feature-rich, however, slightly let down by a rather high price.

Price: \$680

Distributor: Gamedude

URL: www.gamedude.com.au

Phone: 07 3841 5144

SCORE

085



Corsair XMS3200 512MB

The first DDR400 DIMM tested is Corsair's XMS3200 512MB module. Running at a stock speed of 200MHz (400MHz DDR) and featuring a maximum transfer rate of 3.2GB/sec, this is certainly the fastest memory we have tested to date. The module features 8x32MB Samsung chips rated at 6.0ns and is covered by an aluminium heatspreader. We tested the module using SiSoft Sandra's memory benchmark software at speeds of DDR400, DDR333 and DDR266 on a Pentium 4 2.4GHz (533MHz FSB) system running on an Abit IT7 motherboard. DDR333 and DDR266 speeds are easily obtained with a quick trip to the BIOS, however getting the system to run at DDR400 was slightly more involved as we had to overclock the memory due to the fact that the i845E chipset on the Abit IT7 does not officially support DDR400 memory speeds. To reach 400MHz, the system's FSB (front side bus) speed was raised up to 150MHz and using the 3:4 CPU:DRAM ratio provided in the IT7's BIOS, we had the memory running at a solid 400MHz. Due to the fact that, in the DDR400

tests, we had to raise the FSB speed, these results are not comparable to that of the DDR333/266 tests which were run with default FSB speeds of 133MHz. The purpose of the DDR400 benchmarks were simply to determine if the memory could run at its specified speed. From SiSoft Sandra's results we can conclude that, on a Pentium 4-based system, the performance increase when moving from DDR333 to DDR400 memory is well worth the upgrade cost.

Overall, we were very impressed with Corsair's XMS3200 512MB memory module. Not only is it the fastest we've tested, but its high-yield Samsung chips are great for overclockers who require their memory to be run at ultra-high speeds. That said, it's relatively high price tag of \$380RRP may place it out of reach for some users. The bottom line is, if you're a hardcore overclocker looking for a memory upgrade, the Corsair XMS3200 is a must. However, for the less wealthy the cheaper alternatives manufactured by Kingmax or Crucial are a reasonable compromise.

Asher Moses



SiSoft Sandra Memory Benchmark

DDR266 (133MHz FSB) Int						2023
DDR266 (133MHz FSB) Float						2056
DDR333 (133MHz FSB) Int						2382
DDR333 (133MHz FSB) Float						2410
DDR400 (150MHz FSB) Int						2937
DDR400 (150MHz FSB) Float						2993
00	1000	1500	2000	2500	3000	

MEMORY MODEL	CLOCK	EFFECTIVE CLOCK	MEMORY BANDWIDTH
PC1600	100MHz	200MHz	1.6 GB/sec
PC2100	133MHz	266MHz	2.1 GB/sec
PC2700	166MHz	333MHz	2.7 GB/sec
PC3200	200MHz	400MHz	3.2 GB/sec

Excellent memory but a little expensive.

Price: \$380

Distributor: Altech

URL: www.altech.com.au

Phone: 02 9748 2233

093

Saitek Cyborg 3D USB Joystick

If you're a genre-specific gamer, it is relatively easy to find a game controller to suit your needs. For example, if you mainly enjoy playing car racing games, a steering wheel would be the perfect controller for you. However, if you tend to play games based on a variety of genres, it is often hard to find a suitable multi-purpose joystick that will give you an immersive gaming experience across the board.

Looking to bridge this gap is Saitek's latest joystick, the Cyborg 3D USB Gold. As its name suggests, the Cyborg features USB connectivity as well as a fancy metallic looking rotatable gold stick. However, aesthetics aren't the only area where this stick excels as its ergonomic design is comfortable to hold and won't leave you with a swelling wrist after prolonged periods of use.

Lefties will be pleased to hear that the Cyborg 3D can be enjoyed by both left and right-handed gamers. By default, the stick is configured for right-handers, however to change this all that is involved is moving the

throttle lever to the other side, using a handy hex-tool that lies on the stick's base.

The Cyborg features eight programmable buttons with an eight-way hat switch just above the trigger and two shift buttons on the base. All of these buttons are programmable using the provided software and pre-made game profiles can even be downloaded from Saitek's web site for optimal configuration in all of your favourite games.

We gave the joystick a thorough workout in both Microsoft Combat Flight Simulator and Need for Speed: Porsche Unleashed. The stick proved to be very responsive and the rotatable handle came in very handy when used as a rudder in MSCF. Each of the buttons are well placed and the stick's ergonomic design left us firing away at our PCs for hours.

Overall, if you are in the market for a versatile, ergonomic all-in-one gaming controller, this could be just the thing you've been holding out for.

Asher Moses



Ergonomic, well designed, versatile and leftie friendly. Highly recommended.

SCORE

089

Price: \$105.05

Distributor: Tech Buy

URL: www.techbuy.com.au

Phone: 02 9648 1818

Hewlett Packard Ipaq H3870 PDA

Weighing in at only 187 grams the H3870 is light and painless to carry around which is quite a feat considering the functionality it offers. Boasting a 206MHz Intel StrongARM 32-bit RISC processor, 64MB RAM and 32MB of ROM that holds the operating system and Microsoft Office, the H3870 is fast with a significant storage capacity. Bluetooth, the new Intel radio connectivity standard is also included, so for those lucky enough to be in an enabled office, they can conveniently activate the function and gain access to the network from their PDA.

The display utilises a TFT LCD screen at a resolution of 240x320x16 (65,536 available colours) which is clear, sharp and easy to read - even when under direct light. Audio abilities are quite good and as Win CE 3 includes a media player, it's possible to download MP3s to the unit. An in-built recorder can be activated, dictaphone style, from a conveniently located thumb button and the unit's microphone performed

superbly and recorded clearly, even in a noisy environment.

The provided software is comprehensive due to the ROM-based installation of Pocket Office which features Word, Excel, Outlook, IE and Microsoft Transcriber among many others. The transcribing functions in particular were exceptional. Instead of using the graffiti bar and entering your text in letter by letter, the Transcriber allows you to write across the H3870 like a notepad with your handwriting translated word by word with accuracy. Otherwise, the normal range of Win CE PDA features such as a scheduler, appointments, tasks, e-mail and contacts list are all included.

The only real gripe that can be made against the H3870 is that its plastic case opens to the left, like a book cover, making the unit hard to hold safely. A more elegant cover like what can be found on the HP Jornada would have made this unit perfect.

Jere Lawrence



An excellent and full-featured PDA only let down by a poor cover.

SCORE

088

Price: \$1099

Distributor: Harris Technology

URL: www.harristechnology.com.au

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GameCube

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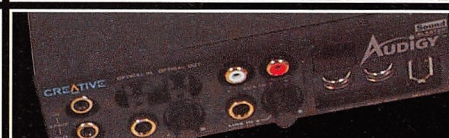
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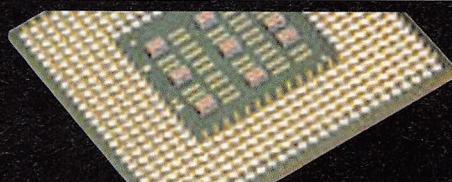


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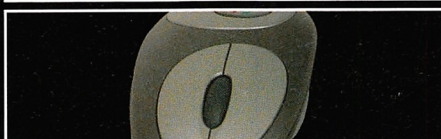
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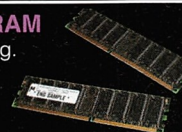
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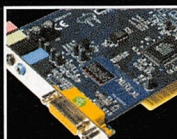
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\$119



**TOTAL BEASTIE
VALUE: \$1999**

SETUP

STUART CALVIN WAXES TECHNICAL

LETTER OF THE MONTH

AN ILIAD OF WOES

Raistlin has a huge problem with a range of questions to match so I've trimmed it to essentials. He had tried just about every troubleshooting tip for some horrendous and seemingly paradoxical video problems.

I've been having a problem with my computer since I first bought it. I can't play heaps of 3D games properly. Usually, this blue screen comes up when I start the game and I always have to reset my computer, otherwise, when I return to the desktop the screen is turned back to 640x480 (from 860x600) and sometimes the colour changes to 256. I re-formatted and re-installed everything, including the video drivers but the problem was still there so I took it back to the shop and the technician said that some games have problems with my video adaptor or I need an update. I downloaded the nVIDIA Detonators, installed and reset but it screwed up my computer completely. When I restarted the screen was totally stuffed. It was in 640x480 at 16-colour. And then some message came up about there being something wrong with the adapter or card or whatever. Can it get any worse? So I uninstalled that driver version and reverted to my old set and it worked except that it STILL couldn't play the 3D games properly. Quake 3 works fine for some reason, as do games like Baldur's Gate 2, Brood War, Diablo and Stunt GP which work perfectly. Tests in DirectX 8.1 worked fine AFTER I installed my MoBo driver. Intel PIII 866MHz, 128MB RAM, TNT2 M64, Vibra 128, GA-6VXE7+.

Raistlin

I just know this to be a corrupt video driver installation. What the video adaptor is able to supply at a minimum will power some 2D games and some less demanding 3D games. You have to reinstall the drivers again and again or delve into the properties of your desktop to teach the Detonators a lesson in manners and this fixes most 640x480 at 16-colour problems.

The Vibra sound card was often the most difficult-to-install peripheral until the Audigy came along - hoorah for Creative. I found the Vibra to be a finicky IRQ hog and I suspect that the Vibra is not allowing anything to share any resource with itself. You see, the video adaptor weenies are smarter than the

sound card pukes and this is not always obvious to us gifted amateurs. While sound is often integrated with the MoBo, it's not as good as a stand-alone fix like video has with its Accelerated Graphics Port. We got a dedicated point-to-point protocol for video because it's not only faster than PCI but because AGP finds it hard to cohabit with anything else.

Even with its separate port, try putting your Audigy or network card in the PCI slot next to the AGP adaptor - hehe, see what happens.

If you format your C-drive, re-install, update drivers and still have problems, what's the likely culprit? The BIOS doesn't change and neither does the hardware. If the BIOS needs an update as someone this month likely did or the hardware is just plain incompatible then "format C:" just won't help.

On the other hand, the latest driver sets are nearly always required to run your system effectively and the originals on OS installation CDs just don't cut it anymore, particularly Win9x. VIA updates its 4in1 driver set quicker than I can change underwear (Too much information! - Ed) but the Intel driver set is seemingly stable hence its infrequent updates. Still, you've gotta have one or another (AMD or ALi or SiS) to ensure that your system has the best chance of performing.

You also have to install the latest OpenGL drivers, if needed, as well as DirectX. The lurking variable, however, is the hardware component driver sets because the wrong sound driver, for example, will always give you problems often in the least likely or expected places. Raistlin found that some games just banged him into a Blue Screen of Death (BSOD). The culprits are 3D games, as 2D isometric titles like Baldur's Gate 2, Brood War, Diablo, Stunt GP (which is 3D-ish) worked perfectly so normally you'd suspect the RAM - if the video drivers are properly installed.

The minimum specs required for 2D games are mid-1990s vintage like Baldur's Gate with its P120, 2MB video adaptor and 16MB of RAM. Even Stunt GP requires only a Direct3D compatible video adaptor. Get those Detonators installed properly, I tell you!

I TOLD YOU SO!

Just wanted to say thank you for reading and replying to my letter. I used your advice and managed to fix up a few of the problems. I'll quickly tell you the end of it - got the computer wiped and put the drivers from the CD on it. It was still stuffed so I opened the case and the amount of dust and gunk in the fan on the card was shocking. The fan had stopped spinning months ago so I blamed the problem on a build up of heat. I put another fan on the card and an extra two fans in the case, one for suck and the other for blow. But still the card didn't work so I had a closer look and the heat had burnt the processor on the actual board. Well bugger hey. In the end I ordered a GF3 Ti200. It was time for the upgrade anyway. Thanks again and keep up the good work.

Shabra

Thank you Shabra. Thermal issues continue to dominate Setup inquiries!

Stop! Errors

Well it's like this. My hardware works a treat with any OS - e.g. Win98, WinMe, Linux and Win2K - except WinXP Pro. When it shuts down it displays this error:
IRQL_NOT_LESS_OR_EQUAL
Technical info Stop:
0x0000000A, 0x000002dc,

0x000000ff, 0x00000000,
0x8051E802

Try disabling Memory Caching or Shadowing in Bios.

I cannot find either in the BIOS. I have XP set up perfectly; ICS, e-mails and gaming all work great. Have downloaded all updates from Microsoft and all other hardware vendors. Please help for this is killing me, I need my PC to shutdown properly. I have a GA-6VXC7-4X and PIII 800EB.

ZOM

The BIOS may have A LOT to do with your problem. Your Gigabyte MoBo comes in two flavours: GA-6VX7-4X-A(P) and GA-6VXC7-4X(-P). The first version has a BIOS update available for "Support WinXP ACPI mode" AKA 'shutdown stuff' and "Supports Pentium III Coppermine D CPU". Several of the VIA 694X Chipset Motherboards had issues with XP. If this is not your solution then shutdown problems in Windows XP can be caused by many other factors, just like earlier versions of Windows. These included: a damaged exit sound file, incorrectly configured, damaged or incompatible hardware, conflicting programs or an incompatible, damaged or conflicting device driver. Most WinXP shutdown issues centre



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around a very few issues, especially legacy hardware and software compatibility issues. Currently, the leading cause of WinXP shutdown problems is hardware incompatibility. However, it is impossible to list every possible hardware or driver issue individually. My best advice is: Check all drivers for all hardware devices to ensure that they are the best current for WinXP. Check this site for up to date information about shutdown problems: <http://aumha.org/a/shutdownxp.php> Also, read the Microsoft Knowledge Base Article Q307274.

It is impossible to list every possible hardware or driver issue. My best advice is: Check all drivers for all hardware devices to ensure that they are the best current for WinXP.

Not aMUSED

I recently bought a Hercules GameSurround MUSE XL and I 'tried' to install the drivers for it on WinXP Pro but at the end of the "Found new hardware wizard" it states that it "cannot install this hardware" and that "the data is invalid". I have installed all the latest drivers from Hercules.com without success. Hercules tech support helped me little. I have asked around and I've been told that it may be that I need to clean install XP as I upgraded it from Win98SE. I was going to format and re-install immediately but backing up everything takes time and I'm not prepared to wipe everything just like that. I just bought the Hercules XPS 210 speaker system and I got the MUSE XL to go with it but I'm being deprived because of this problem and have to run the new system on an old Eagle ALS4000 sound card. I have a Gigabyte 7IXEH and Leadtek A170 GeForce 4 MX440.

Mark Farrell

Hercules told me that the original MUSE drivers included on the installation CD weren't WinXP compatible (as you discovered to your disgust). The GameSurround MUSE XL, Full-Version driver set for Win 98SE/ME/2000/XP is v6.33 dated 26 Feb 02 and this is what you must use. The Promise RAID driver (2.0.0.28) from Windows Update is known to cause skipping and crappy sound. Got the latest DirectX installed? Installed the latest

chipset drivers, too? Upgrading from OS to another is always iffy and that's why a clean install is always recommended.

LogiNot

I am seriously getting owned in Q3A because I am running around with the wrong weapon at the wrong time. The problem I have is that in games, the USB Logitech Cordless Mouseman Optical wheel doesn't work. Not only the mousewheel, but also the mousewheel button (middle button) and the thumb button. I got the latest drivers off the Logitech website, but to no avail. I also downloaded and installed

the "enable the mousewheel in games" patch although it's for 95/98/NT and I'm running Win2KPro. I have an AOpen AX6BC, 256MB PC133 RAM and a GeForce2 MX200.

Necron

You know, Logitech upgrades its drivers really too often for my liking. I do however, think that Logitech keyboards are very cool. This mouse problem often appears to be due to unnecessary additional mouse drivers being present on the system. One user reported success by simply removing reference to other mouse drivers from the registry. However, if you don't like messing with your registry, you can probably achieve the same thing by booting in Safe Mode and then by going to My Computer > Properties > Device Manager and then deleting all mouse drivers, installing your Logitech USB mouse driver software and then rebooting. You may need to unplug and replug the mouse for it to be initially detected. Keep the mouse on a MoBo USB socket rather than an add-in card to use the mouse in Safe Mode.

Help Me!

In your opinion, what would be the best way to share an internet connection between two PCs? The one that has the connection already is running Win98 and the one that will need to connect through the network is Win98SE.

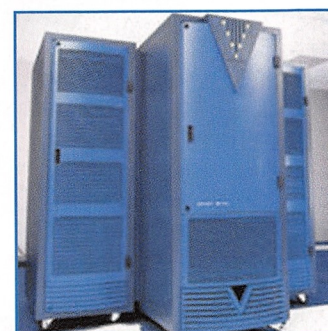
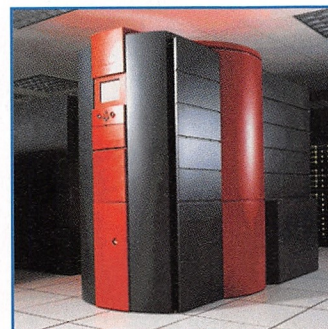
I also have a 1.2GHz Thunderbird, 512MB SDRAM, ASUS Deluxe 'classic' GF3 and some big fast disks. I understand that components in a PC will always be dragged down by the weakest link. What is the slowest part? I only recently upgraded from a GF2 MX and doubled my 3DMark score, but I don't know which would be the next weakest link to get the biggest increase. Lastly, about every one in two boots, the computer brings up a little menu asking if I want to boot off a floppy or SCSI device (which I don't have). This is just before the WinXP logo comes up. It has only been happening since I reinstalled XP. In my previous install, it only seemed to do it when I moved the computer, like, to a LAN or something.

Talon

This would be really easy if it was the Win98SE box that connected to the Internet since it comes with integrated sharing support (Microsoft's own ICS). Struggle through the stuff at <http://www.practicallynetworked.com/sharing/> and see how you go. What's your weakest link in the T-Bird? Nothing specifically as it's a nice balanced system capable of menacing gameplay. What should you upgrade next? Maybe a bang-for-buck AthlonXP+ if the MoBo is compatible; maybe the MoBo for a wicked T-Bird compatible XP+ compliant board; DDR RAM sounds good but check out the recent Memory LOTM. How about an ASUS CRW-4012A do-it-all burner or a Liteon LTD-163D DVD-ROM for some thrills? As for your last problem I have few ideas other than speculation. I searched high and low for an explanation as well as trying to reproduce the problem you describe. It's hardly the BIOS undecided about boot drives as you're too far into the XP startup process. Perhaps it's peculiar to your network setup and without further information I can't pin it down.

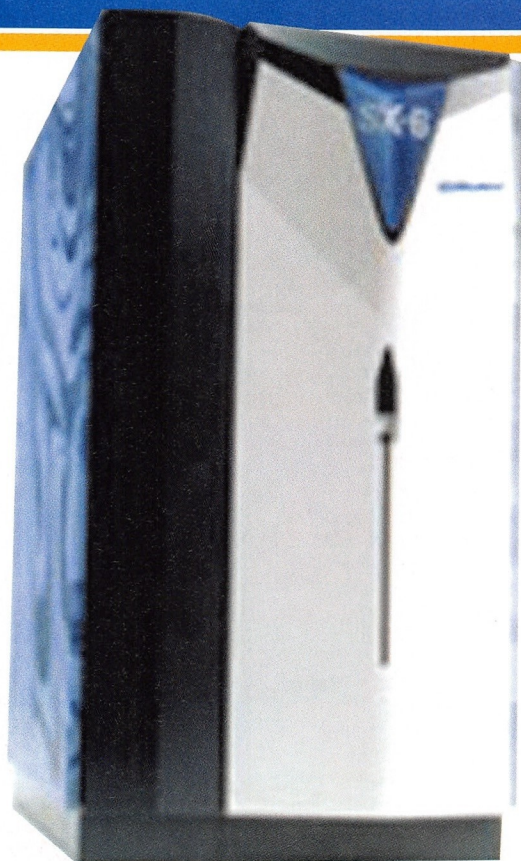
Hot new rig

Hi, I've recently bought a new rig and it's got constant lockups. Some say it's a heat related problem with my AthlonXP 2100+, Thermaltake Volcano 7+, GA-7VRXP, Leadtek GeForce4 Ti4400 and a SoundBlaster Audigy running on WinXP. The idle temp is above 65C and the overall case temp is above 45C.



SETUP

STUART CALVIN WAXES TECHNICAL



Could it be a CPU problem because the computer locks up after running intensive tasks? After talking to my computer-knowledgeable friends and the suppliers, some say my system's too hot. Some say it's the video drivers, so I changed the Leadtek drivers over to the Detonators to no effect. Other people say that the video adaptor draws too much power from the MoBo. I installed a 350W PSU and still, it hangs constantly. Help?

Tomu

Ooh! Ooh! Nice rig but you're shaving 'life' off the CPU with that idle temperature. You have a lot of heat producing components... got a small case? Flat or rounded IDE cables? Intake and exhaust fans fitted? Can you hear anything over the sound of the Volcano?

Very seriously folks, if I ever bought a complete system again (never, I say!) I'd pay someone who custom designs, 'burns' it all in and makes sure that all components are working together before off-loading it onto the unsuspecting public. I reckon I could make a mint by building integrated PC systems that actually uh, work properly. By "working together" I mean things like the heat sink and fan (HSF) actually doing their job of

cooling the CPU (duh) and the video adaptor not only sparking up the monitor but actually getting through a minimum of 24 hours burning through a test application with lots of CPU and video adaptor intensive work.

A roomy case helps when you've got a few hundred watts of power dissipating in a confined space. Nice HSF, loud too, but obviously not doing its job. Was it lapped? What thermal interface material did they use? Ask some questions of the backyard boy-os you got this rig from. As for drivers, Gigabyte assures me that the installation CD for your MoBo includes the VIA 4in1

A roomy case helps when you've got a few hundred watts of power dissipating in a confined space. Nice HSF, loud too, but obviously not doing its job.

driver set with "pure ATA133 driver for the Promise RAID controller". However, don't bet on the vendor actually installing the latest drivers. The 4in1 driver set 4.37(a) added ATA133 features for WinXP and updated the AGP driver (4.10b) among other tweaks. Driver set 4.40(a)P3 not only updates the chipset driver but also updates the AGP driver (4.20a) yet again. Sort out the thermal issues with the vendor as

your system is not an effectively functioning 'system'; they built it, they can fix it.

GeForce Schmefforce

This might be a crap question, but is the GeForce 3 Titanium Series better than a GeForce 4 MX? Oh, and why?

Adam Rees

No question is crap. For knowledge is power and here at PCPP we like to endow you with plenty of "PC Power" so you can, umm, "Play" better. Basically it comes down to this. The GeForce MX440 is nothing more than a GeForce 2 Ultra that's been rebadged with some slightly faster DDR memory and a new 2 dimensional memory addressing technique referred to as Lightspeed Memory Architecture v2 (LMA II). The big difference however is when it comes to hardware features. The MX440 only has the ability to perform vertex calculations in hardware (i.e. the Vertex Shader) and due to the lack of a hardware pixel shader cannot perform any kind of bump mapping or pre-programmed pixel shader effect. In affect, the answer is quite a simple one. If you can afford a GeForce 3 Ti, then get one. This card still packs a mighty punch in the world of gaming and although not as fast and meaty as its GeForce 4 Ti cousins can still render at a very decent rate. The MX440/460 on the other hand is losing ground very quickly and already cards such as the ATI9000 offer better performance (plus full DirectX 8.1 compatibility i.e. Hardware Vertex and pixel shaders) for around about the same price.

driver." I have no idea what/which driver it is talking about. 2) When I try and open certain apps I get a Blue Screen of Death thing happening with the error, "IRQL_NOT_LESS_OR_EQUAL" with the technical info being **** STOP:0x0000000A (0x95D5BB8E, 0x00000002, 0x00000000, 0x804FB6F0)". What the hell is this? 3) When I'm playing a game, it being JKII or WarCraft III, I sometimes get the message about virtual memory being too low and the computer making the paging file bigger (something like that). I have been in the virtual memory options and made it higher and lower with still the same error message being given.

groovy_jedi

Er... what's your OS? 1) Microsoft Knowledge Base Article - Q321808 Error Message: "The Device Driver for the Generic Volume Device is Preventing the System from Entering Standby. This applies to Win2KPro if Adaptec Corporation's Take Two backup software is installed on the computer." So, if you don't have Win2KPro as your OS, do you have a backup program running? 2) What apps? I can tell you that "STOP" errors are Win2K issues and a real hot topic with XP and are mostly related to hardware issues. 3) Low virtual memory problems in XP are generally related to software incompatibility such as Norton's AV Live Update. "HOW TO: Set Performance Options in Windows XP Microsoft Knowledge Base Article - Q308417" should help.

Hot Hot Hot

I have an ASUS P4S533 with a 2.0A GHz P4, 512MB DDR333, ASUS Ti4600 Ultra, 80GB disk, Liteon DVD-ROM, Liteon CDRW and a Live! DE. The CPU idle temperature is always 40C??? To me this sounds high but is that normal? Under load the CPU temperature ranges from 44C to 48C??? The CPU has both a fan and heat sink which Intel has graciously provided, but I've noticed that the fan runs around 2700 rpm??? On the Internet I've read that most fans should run around 5400-6000 rpm!!!! Is that correct??? Also, my motherboard ranges from 36C to 39C!!!! All of these temperature readings I have recorded from the BIOS and also the ASUS PC Probe Windows utility and they

STOP! Take II

Let me just get straight to the point. 1) When I try and enter Standby or Hibernation Modes I continue to get an error saying "The device driver for the "Generic volume" device is preventing the machine from entering standby/hibernation. Please close all applications and try again. If the problem persists, you may need to update this

setup@pcpowerplay.com.au


compare correctly with each other on almost all of the readings bar the occasional degree higher or lower!!! I'm running WinXP Pro and have only essential software installed. I always defrag and keep the machine running squeaky clean! The computer is brand new and since I've upgraded from a P166



measurement of around 83dB. Point is, a larger fan can push more air than a smaller fan at the same rotation speed and generally, the bigger fan will be quieter. Plonk some case fans in and see what happens, otherwise, take it back for rectification work.



your video adaptor to an MX440/460 or a Ti. About the only thing you can't do is swap over the MoBo because of the proprietary power loom and switching. Save your money and buy all those games you mentioned when you finish sticking in some more RIMMs.



The GeForce MX440 is nothing more than a GeForce 2 Ultra that's been rebadged with some slightly faster DDR memory and a new 2 dimensional memory addressing technique...

it's a bit hard to compare if you know what I mean!?! (Damn it he's broken all the question marks and exclamation points on our printer - Ed)

Nathan

Temperature: you are looking for low 30s at idle and up to low 40s for load. The Intel boxed solution is a compromise for noise and price but has been tested to do the job. The Intel HSF will hum along at 2600 rpm with about 50dB of noise and is not a bad jobby. But, you have more than a few heat-dissipating hardware components so note that the max case temperature advised by Intel is 68C; a couple of quiet Sunon case fans (around one watt) will fix this issue, especially if you have a small case. Talking about fan speeds also means talking about noise and airflow. The Thermaltake Volcano 7+ often claims the title of best load performer at around 38C, but as you'd expect, performance comes at a price. It is a VERY LOUD fan with an average

P4 Joker Guy

I'm looking at getting my PC in shape to get the most out of the gaming experience. I've contacted Dell support who have been relatively helpful in giving me bad news - that my current system is very limited in its upgradeability (RAM, HDD, graphics card) due to its motherboard, OS software and memory configuration. Intel 850 chipset, P4 1.4GHz, 256MB PC700 RDRAM, 20GB Ultra ATA HDD and 32MB GeForce2 MX. With the awesome array of 3D games being released and being scheduled (Knights of Old Republic, World of Warcraft, Doom III etc), can you possibly recommend how I could upgrade my existing PC to a decent config?

Ronnie Norton

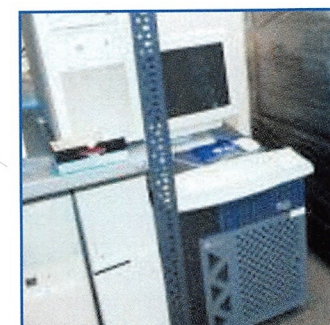
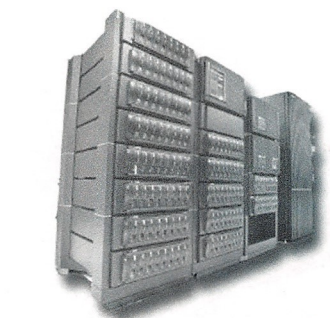
You're kidding me, right? Two things: don't believe a word Dell tells you and simply upgrade

System Secrets Revealed

I was thinking of upgrading the videocard and RAM on my computer but I'm not sure how much my MoBo can handle or if I'll need a new one of those as well. I've attached what Powerstrip says about my rig. What's the best video adaptor/RAM/CPU it could handle? I'd rather not have to buy a new MoBo.

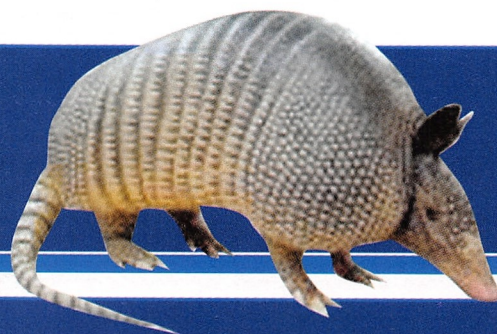
Steven Huff

Sheesh! I wore out my detective hat on this one. From the cryptic information you provided (CPU speed - 802MHz and VIA 694A-686A-6A6LGTGAC-00) you have a PIII 800E (100MHz) or EB (133MHz) with a 510 BGA VT82C694X North Bridge and a 324 BGA VT82C596B South Bridge MoBo (VIA Apollo Pro133A chipset). It was designed to support up to a 1GHz Coppermine (EB) and an 850MHz Katmai (E model). Depending on BIOS updates from the MoBo vendor you may be able to go higher. You're limited to UDMA66 data transfers, again without any further BIOS vendor or VIA driver support. If you use the 800E CPU then you can run your 2GB PC133 RAM using the asynchronous FSB and memory bus feature. It also supports 2X/4X AGP which, as far as I can tell and VIA will tell me, is AGP 2.0 (sort of!). Depending on the brand and model of MoBo you may be able to run only the AGP 3.3v keyed connector which is 1X/2X AGP 1.0 mode. See your friendly retailer for further advice.



The Thermaltake Volcano 7+ often claims the title of best load performer and around 38C, but as you'd expect performance comes at a price. It is a VERY LOUD fan with an average measurement of around 83dB.

ORACLE



WRITE TO THE ORACLE AT:

The Oracle
PC PowerPlay
78 Renwick St
Redfern
NSW 2016

oracle@pcpowerplay.com.au

DVD cheats. WTF? What were these companies thinking of, burying material on a commercially released product? What bright spark thought it would be clever to hide something that could tempt me, the discerning consumer, to purchase a DVD I'd otherwise ignore? But hide it they do. Then some l33t d00d with superfluous leisure time cracks "See Angelina Jolie in a lurex bikini lambada with an armadillo for 15 seconds". He posts the cheat for this gem and our lives are enriched. I can now relive those 15 seconds every night. It's one sexy armadillo.

Might and Magic 8 Day of the Destroyer

Dear PCPP Oracle,
Would you be able to give me a few hints for an older game like Might and Magic 8 Day of the Destroyer? So far in the game I have collected three fighters to help me on the quest and I got onto some island by going across the water (jumping, that is). I collected the power stone and teleported to a different island with a temple. I go inside and get past the bit where you have to jump from thing to thing "barely" then I get into another room and fall somehow, then I get killed. What must I do to get it done properly or am I doing it totally wrong?
P.S. Keep up the great work Oracle, PCPP#76 was lots of help.

**Brock Lahdensuo,
Gympie.**

Hail to Brock, the Oracle salutes you! Gratitude will always get you everything. As for how to get through the Room of Fall-Through-the-Floor-and-Die-in-a-Snake-Infested-Pit, you've probably worked out that the floor is an illusion. Not all though - some of it is real. If you look up, you will spot a glowing red pathway. This is a guide for you to follow closely across the room.

Feel like a bit of revenge on those snakes? To kill them without actually having to fall down to them, click on the north wall in the corridor to the west. One spot will open up to show some stairs which you can descend to reach the snakes. Use the old fire and retreat tactic to kill them with minimal harm to yourself.

I'm sure you're wondering what's in the treasure chests in the illusionary-floor room. Seeing as you have to jump to get to these, which means dropping through the floor again, make sure you have Feather Fall on.

Click on them quickly before you fall past them. Oh, and the chests are trapped, but two of them contain quest items so are worth the trouble. If your Disarm Trap skill is pathetic, you'll have to heal up before opening each chest.

There's an even nastier room further on. Save your game before you venture in. Here's a hint: the glowing red eyes are not just part of the decor.

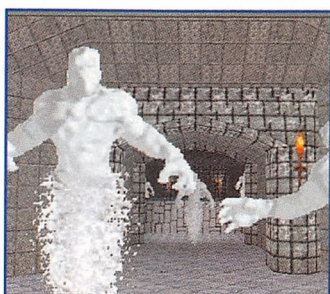
Can you help me?? I'm playing M&M 8 Day of the Destroyer and I'm stuck on Eccletons riddles. I managed to guess the first one, but am stuck on the other two. Please help!!

**Frosty
E-mail**

Another M&M8 player! Good to see them appearing out of nowhere - kind of like turning on the light late at night and watching the roaches take cover. Now, as for Escaton's riddles - by answering him correctly you not only enable him to give you



Thriller... thriller night!



Neverending box of Tim-Tams?

the last quest of the game, but his hints will tell you how to solve the quest. Then you can put that box back on top of the bookcase and never touch it again. The Oracle uses these boxes as building materials in his gaming-palazzo. They do a mighty fine job of holding up the roof and providing insulation. You managed the first answer, Prison. The second answer is Egg. The third answer is Inside. Now go and exercise that flabby grey stuff called a brain and finish the quest by freeing the elemental lords.

De Plane! De Plane! GTA3

G'Day Oracle,
I have heard rumors of there being a fourth island in Grand Theft Auto 3 and that the only way to get there is by either finishing the game with

100%, which will in turn open the tunnel near the dam in Island 3, or by finding a way to fly the plane. What I want to know is:

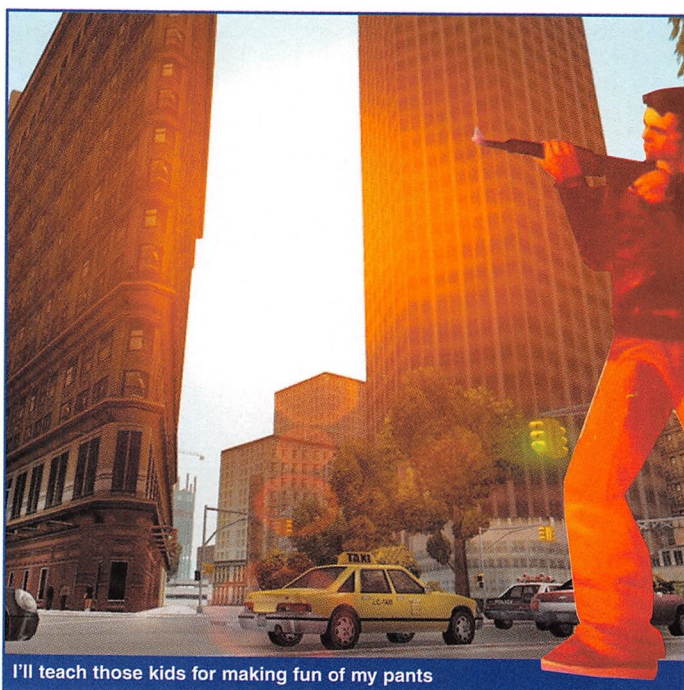
1) Does the fourth island exist and if so, can you get there any other way than having to get 100% in the game?

2) Is it possible to fly the plane?

Damien Hopkinson

Damien, the fourth island is a false rumour. The closest thing to a fourth island is a Ghost Town but getting 100% in the game will not unlock it. To get there you have to fly in the Dodo plane. So yes, you can fly the plane, but not to a fourth island. You can fly all around the game checking it out just for the heck of it and you can even do aeronautical tricks to impress your mates, but before midgets start shouting "de plane!"

As for how to get through the Room of Fall-Through-the-Floor-and-Die-in-a-Snake-Infested-Pit, you've probably worked out that the floor is an illusion.



I'll teach those kids for making fun of my pants

you'll need to practice to get the hang of it. Here are some tips on how to fly:

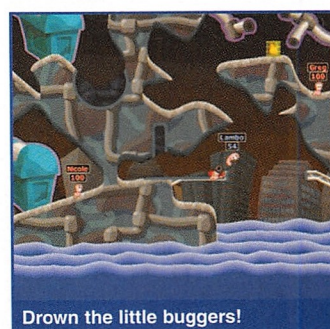
The Dodo plane is at Francis International Airport in Shoreside Vale. When taking off, you can't use firstperson view - you have to see the entire plane. You will know when you have enough speed when you see sparks from the bottom of the Dodo and you hear it scraping on the runway (turn off radio).

Once airborne, the easiest way to gain altitude without stalling is to fly around the coast of the islands. As you fly, the Dodo will constantly be gaining altitude. It will eventually fly at its highest altitude, which is approximately the height of the top of the Callahan Bridge. Don't let up on the fuel, otherwise you'll lose altitude. Use the cursor keys to steer - just a tap of the key is sufficient; don't hold them if you want a safe flight.

Don't turn too quickly, fly over unique jumps or fly off the edge of the map. When you want to land, stop the gas, which will cause the plane to descend but never let the nose go below 45 degrees. The plane should also be level before descending.

Ghost Town: Remember where you and your accomplices robbed the Liberty City Bank in the opening movie? Well the Ghost Town is where that bank is located. It's a secret island behind Shoreside Vale.

Once you've got your pilot's



CODE

THE ORACLE SHOWS YOU HOW TO SQUEEZE OUT EVERY OUNCE OF GAMING GOODNESS FROM YOUR FAVOURITE GAMES.

STRONGHOLD

At the main menu, press [Shift] + [Alt] + A to enable cheat mode. Repeatedly press one of the following codes whilst playing to activate the cheat:

CODE RESULT

[Alt] X :
100 popularity and 1000 more gold

[Alt] L :
Level up one unit

[Alt] P :
Level up characters

[Alt] G :
Destroy main stronghold

[Alt] K :
Destroy the enemy's fortress

[Alt] C :
Cycle characters

[Alt] S :
Change time

[Alt] D :
Debug mode

[Alt] Q :
Faster gameplay

[Alt] Y :
Defeat all on-screen enemies

[Alt] Z :
Defeat selected enemy

HINTS

Keeping bears away:

Your popularity takes a dive when bears kill civilians. To avoid this, build a wooden fence around the bear when it appears.

Keeping the catapult or trebuchet firing:

When your catapult or trebuchet is out of ammunition and you have no stones left in your stockpile, simply click on the "Launch Cow" button and click a wall. Immediately click Stop after the order is made and the catapult will fire a rock instead. You have to have a supply of cows to do this.



FIFA WORLD CUP 2002

Score Easily:

In any match you can make the keeper come out. Go on to the other team, pass the ball to the team that you selected and hold down + Q. When the keeper comes to you hold Q and press Esc. Let go of Q and go back to your team.

All-Americas team:

Win the World Cup with a North American or South American team to unlock the All-Americas team in a friendly match.

Score from corner:

Use any star player to take the corner, then curl the ball towards and between the goal

posts. Aim it lower and press D. Every time you get a corner you will score a goal.

All-World team:

Unlock the All-Americas, All-European, All-Asian and All-African teams to unlock the All-World team in a friendly match.

All-African team:

Win the World Cup with an African team to unlock the All-African team in a friendly match.

All-Asian team:

Win the World Cup with an Asian team to unlock the All-Asian team in a friendly match.

All-European team:

Win the World Cup with a European or Oceanian team to unlock the All-European team in a friendly match.

Cheat mode:

This procedure involves editing a game file; create a backup copy of the file before proceeding. Use a text editor to edit the "soccer.in" file in the game folder. Add one of the following lines to the file to activate the corresponding cheat function.

CHEAT_UNLOCKED_TEAMS=1:

All-World team, All-Americas team, All-Asia team and All-Europe team

UNLOCK_TOURNAMENT=1: Unlock all tournaments

AGGRESSIVE_TACKLE_CHEAT=1:

Aggressive tackles

CHEAT_EQUAL_TEAM_STATS=0:

Equal team stats

CHEAT_RANDOM_TEAMS=1 CPU:

CPU picks random teams

DEMO_MODE=1:

Demo mode

WINDOWED=1:

Windowed game

ORACLE

licence, fly to the mountains visible from the north side of Portland or Staunton Island. Fly through them (no collision detection) then turn west. Fly under the mountains to underneath Shoreside Vale. Remember walls are not solid here.

After you pass through the mountain underneath the mountains,

basic training is renowned for being a stumbling block and the secret to success here is that you have to combine jumping with firepunching. Standing under the crate on the highest platform, hit backspace twice to do a backflip. When you're at the top of the jump, press space. This will perform a firepunch, which

Blood was splattering everywhere, I've never witnessed this amazing display of gore goodness, where can I get a copy of this mod?

you'll come to a small, half-built city. This is Ghost Town. You can't land here because nothing is solid. To exit without dying, look for a large space near the Ghost Town where there's no water, just black. If you fly into it, you should come out in the Shoreside Vale tunnel. This is the open tunnel, not the barricaded one.

Worms Armageddon

Hello Oracle, I hope you will heed my call for help. I am apparently stuck on Worms Armageddon. I just can't seem to find the secret of fire punches in Basic Training Level 2.

Clinton Lourey
Bahr Scrub

Apparently stuck? Clinton, you really do need the Oracle's help if you're not even sure whether you're stuck or not. The firepunching task in

enables you to collect the crate which gives you another two firepunches. You can then firepunch the other targets in the same way. You don't really need to backflip for the last crate, just hit the backspace once to do a straight up jump. Now that you've earned the silver medal, set your sights on the gold.

Jedi Knight II

Help me! I've just bought this game and I'm stuck. I'm up to that level where you have to find Reelo's ship. That was easy. I've opened up the roof but then Reelo said something about fuel. I'm lost. PLEASE HELP!

Adam Baumeister
E-mail

Before I start what's in a name? Adam, it's Reelo's hideout and Lando is the guy you're helping,

remember? You're gonna have to kill Reelo and his cronies sooner or later and it's a good idea to be clear about identifying the bad guys. Yeah, I'm pedantic. Deal with it. Ok, you've killed lots of bad guys in the docking bay and managed to make sure Lando doesn't get killed in the process. Lando now tells you to refuel and open the roof so you can escape. If you examine the blue and red piping that's connected to the ship, that's the codes for refuelling. The big fuel tank is to be found if you exit the hanger and head right. You can't miss it - it's that big tank with all the piping connecting to it. Enter the codes on the panels. The red code is a small grey stop sign, the blue code is a yellow X. The first time Oracle did this, the panels were inactive, if this happens to you, it's because Lando hasn't moved his butt out of the hanger and he's stuck. You'll have to reload the game back to an earlier point and make sure he goes to the Lady Luck.

While you're entering the codes for the fuel tanks, check out the secret area. Jump on top of the fuel tank and you'll see some Bacta tanks on a ledge. Jump on the pipes to reach them. Now to open the hangar roof. Find 2 grates in the floor and burst through them. In the rooms that are found down here are five computers that need to be activated. Once this is done, the roof opens and Lando

summons you back to the Lady Luck, so that you can be ready for the battle with Reelo and Co. There's a cannon on the Lady Luck you can use to take him out, activated by a panel in the cockpit.

Day of Defeat Blood & Gore Mod

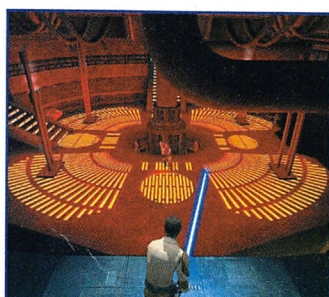
Dear Oracle, You have stated your willingness to squeeze out every ounce of gaming goodness from our favourite games, so here is my request for help. Recently, I played



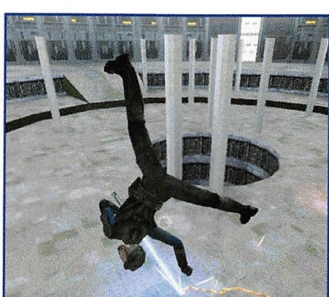
Damn, was that one of ours?



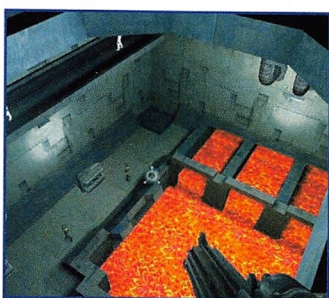
Prepare to be decommissioned



Geez this night club is dead



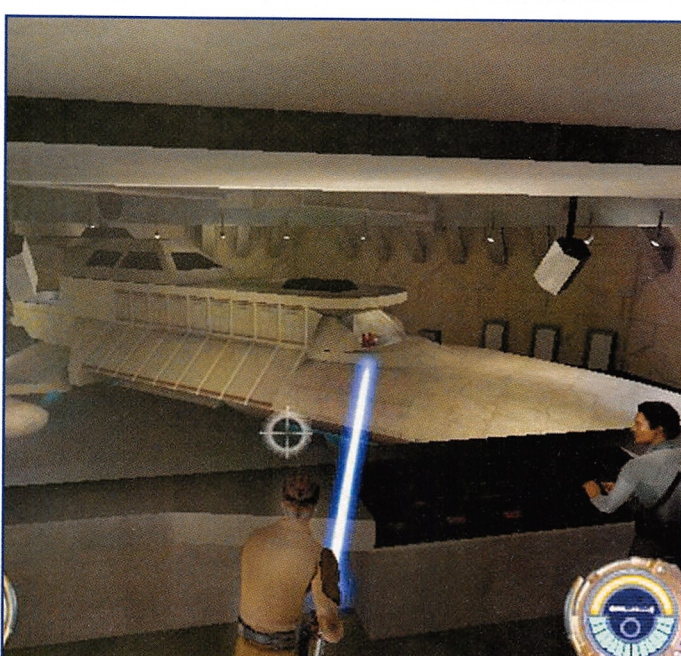
Whoops! Mind that first step...



AH HA! A giant pool of spaghetti!



Yeah, yeah, take the photo...



I'm going to light saber the snot out of everyone here

online the Half-Life mod Day of Defeat through Gamespy Arcade, which I do at least once a week for a bit of fun and enjoyment. However, the most amazing gameplay was occurring - blood was splattering everywhere - on the walls, on the ground, everywhere. As a soldier was being hit by a stream of bullets and when a grenade exploded near a soldier he got blown to bits. I have the full mod of Day of Defeat v3.0 and I have been an avid fan of this mod since v2.0 and have never witnessed this amazing display of gore goodness. Please, where can I get a copy of this mod?

Rod Garner, Nambour
E-mail

Rod, let me phrase this question for you. You played DOD one day and enjoyed the mighty gore overdrive. Did you notice the name of the map? I was not looking over your shoulder at the time, so how would I know which one you were playing? I don't keep lists of what maps are sent out by the host servers for every damn DOD match! However, seeing as you're salivating after blood and gore extraordinaire, you'd better start checking out the mods and custom maps. Try these sites and make sure you've got the latest patch of DOD. Gaming once a week is not nearly often enough either. The Oracle prescribes a daily dose.
<http://www.devil1.addr.com/>
<http://www.kustomkettle.com/index.html>
<http://dod-mod.co.uk/>
<http://www.fileplanet.com>

Stronghold

I was just wondering if you could send me by email any cheats or patches for the PC game Stronghold.
Nathan Phillips
E-mail

Your wishes are granted. Check out the Code section.



Bollocks, I've got me head stuck again

CODE

SOLDIER OF FORTUNE 2

To enable cheats :
Press ~ to display the console window. Type setrandom sv_cheats 1 and press [Enter]

god:

God mode

noclip:

No clipping

give all:

All weapons and ammo

<item name>:

Spawn item

give armor:

Armour

give ammo:

Full ammo for current

weapons

health:

Health give

stamina:

Stamina give

pinkspider:

Unlimited power

notarget:

Disable enemy AI

nofatigue:

Never get tired

cmdlist:

List console commands

mapname:

Display current map name

dir maps:

List maps

map, spdevmap or devmap

<level name>:

Advance to indicated map

raven 1:

Level select icon at main menu

g_gravity <0-800>:

Change gravity. 800 is

default; set to 0 to fly

g_speed <number>:

Change movement rate. 320

is default; lower is slower

name <text>:

Change player's name

toggle r_fullscreen:

Toggle windowed and full

screen; will restart game

serverinfo:

Show current server settings

reconnect:

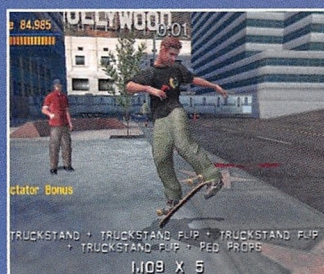
Reconnect to last server

kill:

Suicide

quit:

Exit game



TONY HAWK'S PRO SKATER 3

In the Cheats menu, under Options type in the following:

GiveMeSomeWood:

Skater will have all boards

idkfa:

You will get the Doom guy form the Doom game and the Gearbox Tribute movie peepshow:

All movies except Gearbox Tribute unlocked. Cash

register sound means code

is entered correctly

roadtrip:

All goals now completed,

unlocking the levels

yohomies:

All skaters are unlocked

MAGICMISSILE:

Unlocks all skaters, all levels and all cheats. Also

completes career mode for

your current skater and

gives you deck, stats and

trick slots

WEEATDIRT:

Unlock Neversoft skaters; at

the Create-A-Skater menu

enter one of the developer's

names to get their skater.

pumpmeup:

In career mode select the

skater whose stats you want

to max out and all stat

points for that character will

be acquired

THE MATRIX (DVD)

Bullet Time

In the [Main Menu] go to the [Special Features] and select [The Dream World]. Apart

from the text menu entries

there's also a red pill. Select it

and the "What Is Bullet Time?"

documentary will start.

Hidden Concept

In the [Special Features] section, go to [Cast & Crew Bios] and select the Warchowsky Brothers. Select the red pill and a 12-minute documentary called "What Is Concept?" will start.

Follow the White Rabbit

In [Special Features] select the [Making the Matrix] option and press [Enter]. Then select [The Dreamworld] option and press [Enter]. Next, press [Continue] and select [Follow the White Rabbit]. When watching the film, nine white rabbits will appear in the lower left-hand corner. When one appears, press [Enter] and a behind the scenes featurette will play, returning you to the film on ending.

White Rabbit Chapter Sequence:

[Chapter 1] : Trinity In A Jam

[Chapter 10] : Slimy Re-birth

[Chapter 15] :

Morpheus/Neo Matchup

[Chapter 23] : Glitch in the

Matrix

[Chapter 24] : One Left

Behind

[Chapter 29] : Lobby

Shooting Sequence

[Chapter 30] : Dodge This

[Chapter 32] : Rooftop

Rescue

[Chapter 33] : Subway

Showdown

LARA CROFT: TOMB RAIDER (DVD)

Hidden interview

In the main menu, select the "Special Features" option. Press Down until the "Main Menu" option is highlighted. Press Down again to highlight the Pisces symbol, then press Enter to view an interview featuring Angelina Jolie and Jon Voight.

Mod Life

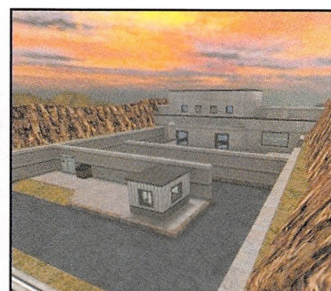
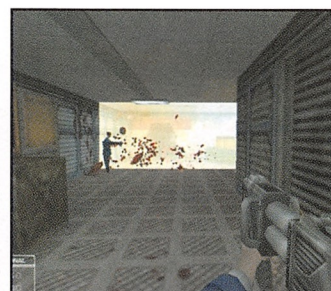
When out of the box just ain't enough

Half Life Science & Industry

Scientific research, whether it be into genetics or new wonder drugs, means big business. Although the stereotypical bifocal-wearing nerd in a white lab coat may be the butt of office jokes, corporations take their research very seriously. Which is where Science & Industry comes into the picture. As a security officer for one of two rival scientific research corporations, players must use any means possible to protect the research of their own company, whilst attempting to "poach" scientists or otherwise hamper the research progress of the rival company.

The gameplay in S&I is slow but well-balanced to start with as players are only given a do-it-all "Briefcase of Power" as their first weapon. This seemingly indestructible piece of luggage can be used to smash into the faces of enemies, destroy the equipment of the rival company, and to knock out and kidnap opposing scientists.

However, as productivity within your own company increases, the action picks up. As each of the rival corporations just happens to be in the business of weapons research, the more players that keep their scientists happy (by safeguarding the equipment and keeping enemy infiltration to a minimum), the more new toys they get to play with. The assortment of weapons and armour



on offer via S&I's technology tree is astounding with even more on the way. Real creativity and imagination has been used to produce an arsenal that stays well clear of what players have come to expect in mediocre FPS mods.

Although the subject matter sounds dry, S&I is one of the better mods out there, primarily because of its multi-dimensionality. Apart from employing traditional FPS tactics, players must also use a number of different means to

ensure the scientist NPCs stay productive. Rather than being frag-based, victory is determined by how much money and research a corporation has generated, with players penalised in dollar terms for being killed.

At the time of writing, the second public beta of version 0.98 had just been released with the final version hot on its heels. A significant update over the last version which was released in November 2001, S&I is quite simply a must have.

5/5

For: Half-Life

Version: 0.98

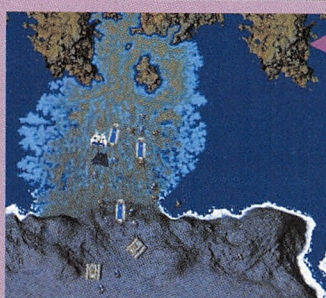
Size: 5.6MB

URL: www.planethalflife.com/si



Bushido

As its name might suggest, Bushido is a class-based mod set in feudal Japan, where a code of honour will dictate gameplay. Different weapons and abilities will be player-specific, allowing players to specialise in their chosen class. Based upon a scan of the maps and models on the nifty website, this mod could be huge. Fans of the genre will be glad to know that a beta test will precede Bushido's anticipated release sometime later this year.



SWTA

Although Force Commander and Galactic Battlegrounds might be out, this mod is worth a look for Star Wars and/or RTS fans. Whilst the project has been going since 2000, the current team is still at it, constantly adding new units and maps. Although SWTA doesn't feature a campaign mode, there's plenty of fun to be had in multiplayer contests. The gameplay in SWTA is simple and the mod stable enough for players who had issues with Commander or Battlegrounds.

For: Half-life **Rating:** N/A **URL:** www.planethalflife.com/bushido/

For: Total Annihilation **Rating:** 3/5 **URL:** planetannihilation.com/swta

with Derek Lee

UT Marathon Resurrection



PC gamers have often looked on sadly or with thinly disguised contempt at our Mac-gaming brethren. For the most part, Mac gamers have had to put up with a sparse library of titles, often months out of date. One of the few exceptions to the norm was the stellar Marathon from Bungie Software which, because of its high level of interactivity and insanely intricate storyline, made even PC gamers envious, if only for a short time.

So the Mac got one over the PC. So what? Remember this is 1994 we're talking about, folks.

Marathon Resurrection is an ambitious attempt by Team Unpfhorgiven (Apparently, this is not a gross typo - Ed) to re-build the original Marathon from the ground up while adding improved AI, new enemies, weapons and maps. Not to be confused with a rival port (titled Marathon: Rampancy) Resurrection runs on the UT engine. Whilst regarded

as being truer to the original and featuring superior models, the last beta release of Resurrection almost a year ago was criticised for, among other things, some ordinary map design.

The latest release, which is a full demo, attempts to address these problems and also fixes some issues with weaponry and the HUD. A welcome feature is the ability to interrupt weapon reloads by switching to another weapon. Although new multiplayer maps have been included, the maps in Resurrection are a little weak. They obviously play second fiddle to the now well-balanced arsenal and frenetic gameplay. Overall, the result is a much more stable and balanced mod experience.

Although this mod, over others with the same aim (there are also Marathon ports using the Q3 and Half Life engines), best captures the feel of the original Marathon, if you've never played the original you probably couldn't care less. Thankfully, even for players coming into the series afresh, Resurrection offers something all FPS players should appreciate: classic, fast-paced gameplay with plenty of weapons on offer. The fact that there's an intriguing storyline to boot should be enough to sway even diehard Mac-haters.



4/5

For: Unreal Tournament

Version: 1.2

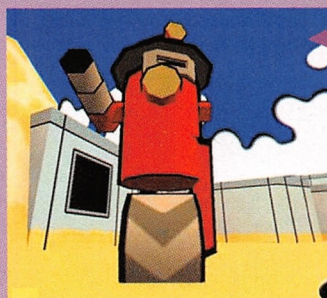
Size: 120MB

URL: resurrection.bungie.org/index.html

Warhammer TA

This is another TA mod that will appeal to a specific group of players, namely fans of Games Workshop's popular Warhammer 40K desktop miniatures. For those unfamiliar with the setting, think fantasy meets space. At this stage, a pack containing only infantry units and some vehicles is available with more on the horizon. Given the small size of the download (3MB), the overall stability, and the number of new and detailed units on offer, this mod is worth virtually any TA fan's time.

For: Total Annihilation Rating: 4/5 URL: www.tauniverse.com/wta



BuzzyBots 2.1

This mod has won plenty of rave reviews and with the recent release of version 2.1, which fixes all major bugs associated with earlier versions, there's no excuse not to check it out. New models, animation and sounds mean it's worth a download for devotees and newcomers alike. If you're one of the latter, BuzzyBots' cartoonish graphics and simple but addictive gameplay will win you over. No wonder it was one of a select few mods featured at Valve's recent Mod Expo.

For: Half-Life Rating: 4/5 URL: www.buzzybots.dk

DVD GUIDE

I'd like to point out first up this month that I try to keep things interesting on the index page in the vain hope that some of you might actually take the time to read it. This is very important to me and will no doubt become increasingly important to you as I begin to hide small but essential pieces of information within it which you may need to, say, find a certain file or unlock a certain game. I *might* do this.

What I will always do, though, is present you with an entirely new pic of yours truly each month. At least for as long as people keep feeling the need to e-mail them to me, at any rate. This issue's fine example is the proud work of Sam Hardy, one of Australia's most aspiring Flash animators. Look forward to something big from this young man in the near future. If it wasn't for the big gun I'm carrying I imagine I'd probably get beaten up for dressing like this in some parts of town.

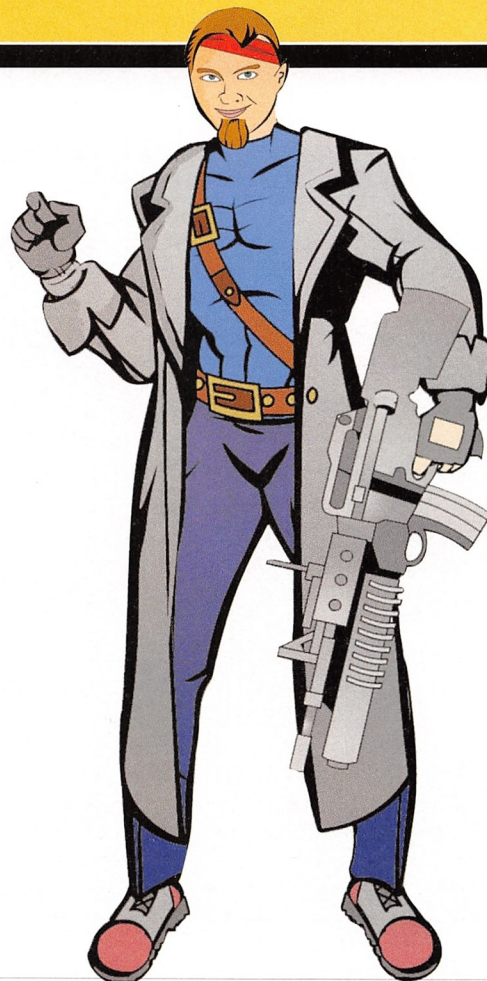
But back to the DVD. I must have gone completely mod crazy this issue. Trying to fill all the requests that have come from the forums has been a ridiculously time-intensive task and never would have been achieved if not for the help of certain friendly PCPP fans and Netizens. They are mentioned later. So this issue's DVD has well over 1GB of modding madness. Check out Mods Plus for the first in a series of themed modding mayhem.

Spotlight's got a brand new section called The BIG Patch that should take care of updating all the most popular games out there, as well as the usual mix of mega-sized content.

The Bunker, after going map happy in PCPP#78, has reverted back to being the splendiferous melange of essential files to help you get the most out of your tired old gaming titles. There's also a whole bunch of new game trailers for you to check out.

Flashback has it's latest instalment of computer gaming history for you - just a small update this issue. You're bound to notice a change in the CDs too. What?! No FREE game!??? That's right. This issue's CDs have taken a sidestep from free games in order to dispose of the backlog of game demos that have been piling up under my desk since the middle of winter. More demos, more mods, more patches. What more could you want from me?!

Paul A. Noone
Disc Master



FREE ANIME! Robotech

Distributor: Madman

Duration: 22 minutes

Notes: Works on a set-top DVD player or on a PC with software DVD player installed

Strap into your Veritech and get ready for the ride of your life!

When a mysterious space battleship crashes onto Macross Island in the South Pacific, the future of mankind is changed forever. Realising that there are hostile forces in the universe, the people of Earth race to rebuild the SDF-1 as their first line of defence against a possible alien attack. But even as they struggle to master the science of Robotechnology, the vengeful Zentraedi armada is approaching the Earth!

The classic television series that turned an entire generation onto the world of Japanese Anime is back!



The old super-glue to the fingers trick never fails to amuse



We've been holding hands for hours... I wonder if I'm pregnant yet



YAH! I'm taking this thing to TIJUANA!

DVD POWERPLAY DEMOS



Gothic

Not for the weak-hearted

http://www.piranha-bytes.com/html_english/products/gothic/html/_gothicframe.htm



Midtown Madness 2

Wacky, zany, crazy madness

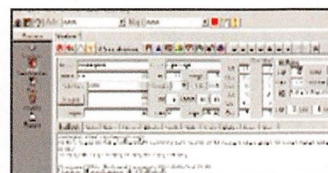
<http://www.microsoft.com/games/midtown2/>



Stronghold Crusader

Just try it. Go on, I dare you

<http://stronghold.godgames.com/>



RoleplayingMaster 1.9b

Why be yourself when you can be someone better?

<http://stronghold.godgames.com/>

Well, here's the demo I've deliberately been avoiding for inclusion on the coverdiscs for so long. After playing it you'll no doubt understand why. I'm not trying to put anybody off this - and neither are my opinions in any way biased towards this genre - but this demo is purely because some of you asked for it. Not because I think it's worth the 270MB of valuable disc space it takes up!

Need: Windows 98/ME/2000/XP, PII 300, 64MB RAM.

I was going to whack this one into the Flashback section. It's a classic and still one of the most popular downloads on FilePlanet. Midtown Madness 2 delivers even more mad-cap racing excitement with all the wild and hair-raising racing challenges you've come to expect! The Midtown Madness 2 demo features one of the two cities, two cars, three gameplay modes and multiplayer.

Need: Pentium 266 MHz, Windows 95/98, DirectX 7.0a, 250MB.

Stronghold Crusader is the next installment in Firefly Studios' Stronghold series of "castle sims", combining the best elements of RTS and city-building games. It builds and improves upon the gameplay of the original Stronghold with the inclusion of new types of warriors and workers, new weapons and a new desert setting that forces new fighting tactics on the battlefield.

Need: Windows 98/ME/2000/XP, PII 300, 64MB RAM.

RPM is the result of over a year and a half's work, incorporating a two-month beta release of over 200 playtesters. This special 1.9b release was made specially for PCPP readers and has an expiration date of December 30, 2002. This is to encourage you to download and use the latest update. So give it a try, give generously and let him know what you think. [Aussie! Aussie! Aussie!]

Need: Win 98 - XP, 200+MHz, 64MB RAM, IE5.

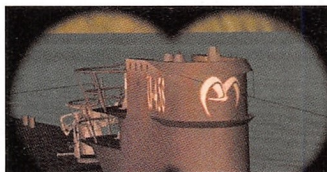
THE BIG PATCH

Destroyer Command & Silent Hunter

Survival of the fittest

<http://www.silenthunterii.com/>

This patch enables Silent Hunter II to play multiplayer sessions with Destroyer Command. In addition to adding multiplayer functionality, this patch also provides some AI and function enhancements to Silent Hunter II. (NOTE: Players using Destroyer Command MUST have the Destroyer Command v1.1 patch to enable multiplayer sessions with Silent Hunter II)



Dungeon Siege

Version 1.0 - 1.1

<http://www.microsoft.com/games/dungeonsiege/>

The first official non-beta patch is available and will update your v1.0 install to v1.1. Hopefully you weren't so keen as to have installed the pre-release beta patch first, otherwise you may need to do a reinstall. The version number of your game will be displayed on the main menu, towards the bottom of the screen, just above the Exit button.



Thief 2: The Metal Age

It ain't new, but it's a big'un

http://www.eidosinteractive.com/gsl/legacy/thief_metalage/

This is a patch for version 1.07 of Thief 2: The Metal Age. You can call up the autoplay panel by running the program "panel.exe" found on the Thief 2 play CD. This patch will reset any saved game to the beginning of the mission. If you have a minimum install, the patch will automatically copy additional files necessary for a normal install.



MODS PLUS

Quake III: Arena

m3Ga m0DD@g3 b0N@Nz@

<http://www.silenthunterii.com/>

This month we're celebrating one of the greatest games of all time. Yes, that's right dudes and dudettes, here is one fine GiG's worth of kick-arse mods for Quake III: Arena. Apologies for those who don't own the game but your turn will come. Besides, if you don't own it, you now have a perfectly valid reason for forking out the \$20 they're asking for it these days.



CD GUIDE

CD01 DEMOS

Mobile Forces [updated]

<http://www.mobile-forces.com/>

Mobile Forces is a first person shooter built on top of Epic's Unreal technology and offers eight game modes and 11 sprawling and realistic environments. Unleash warfare in a diverse range of vehicles with groundbreaking physics. This updated demo has many improvements including: dedicated server option, improved networking code, player and announcer spoken voices.



Syberia [updated]

<http://www.syberia.info/>

Syberia is a first person game which chronicles the life of lawyer Kate Walker as she tries to locate Hans in Siberia. The 3D creations engender a series of highly unique atmospheres. The web site is also worth a look. This special press demo contains a walkthrough with a story-line synopsis, features and gameplay instructions.



Team Factor 1.5

<http://www.7fx.com/>

The "Team Factor" story takes place at present time, complete with realistic weapons, equipment and environments. Basically it will be a fight between two teams with a third one trying to achieve its own independent objective which collides with objectives of the first two teams. This demo offers a different map from the other demo called Sarajevo and incorporates the improvements and changes from the v1.5 patch.



Prince Of Qin

<http://english.object.com.cn/products/zhuanqu/qinshang>

Pick your fighting buddies, buy/sell weapons, learn new skills as you advance through the levels and basically take out anyone who comes near you. The scenery, though lush, is fairly repetitive and boring but the graphics and gameplay can still manage to keep you enthralled for at least one mission.



MoonBase Commander

http://www.funkidsgames.com/games/moonbase_commander_pc/

MoonBase Commander features multiple and unique opposing factions, bright graphics, a light story-line and various types of terrain that can be easily customised with the terrain editor. Bottom line: MoonBase Commander is an addictive, turn-based strategy game with a simpler feel that provides an exciting entrance into a proven genre.



New World Order MP

http://www.funkidsgames.com/games/moonbase_commander_pc/

Be a part of the multiplayer team-based game where you battle it out in situations that could be taken right out of an action movie. DirectPlay 8.2 will improve your game performance in the NWO Multiplayer Test 2.0.



CD02 DEMOS, MODS AND PATCHES



Batman Vengeance
Holy Toledo

<http://www.ubi.com/US/Games/batmanvengeancegc/>

After the Joker plummets to his death in an attempt to kill Batman, Gotham's criminals quickly escalate their schemes to gain power. Batman discovers subtle links in these seemingly unrelated crimes, but is forced undercover. Become Batman with blistering martial arts combos, over 500 unique animated moves and a multi-functional cape with its own AI.

Need: Windows 98/ME/2000/XP, PII 300, 64MB RAM.



Op Flash: Resistance
Resist if you dare

<http://www.bistudio.com/resistance/>

Operation Flashpoint: Resistance casts the player as Victor Troska, ex-Special Forces soldier, living a peaceful civilian life on the island of Nogova, a short distance from the original game's three islands. However, his situation changes when a Soviet force invades the island group and destroys Troska's idyllic dreams. Resistance hopes to bring back the gameplay fans have grown so fond of and take it up a notch.

Need: Win 98 - 2000, DirectX 8.1, 256MB RAM, 733MHz, 1GB HDD.

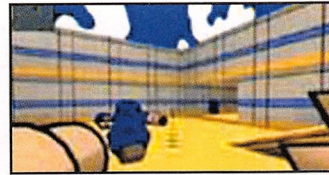


Counter-Strike 1.0.0.5 & Half-Life 1.1.1.0

<http://www.planethalflife.com>

By popular demand (and for those who don't grab incremental updates as I make them available on the CDs), here is the full client for the Counter-Strike mod version 1.0.0.5, as well as the latest Half-Life patch which will patch any version of HL up to 1.1.1.0. Also within the updates is the Ricochet mod for Half-Life that changes the standard first person style to a third person game with deadly, disc-like Tron gameplay.

File Name [115MB]: cs1005.exe



BuzzyBots 2.1b - [Half-Life]

<http://www.planethalflife.com>

There's no excuse not to check this award-winning mod out. New models, animation and funky sounds mean it's worth a download for devotees and newcomers alike. If you're one of the latter, Buzzybots' cartoonish graphics and simple but addictive gameplay will win you over. No wonder it was one of a select few mods featured at Valve's recent Mod Expo.

Install: buzzybots_v21b.exe [8.52MB]



Science & Industry
Oh no, not science! ARGHH!

<http://www.planethalflife.com/si/>

Science and Industry is a teamplay mod for Half-Life, in which players assume the role of a security officer in one of two rival corporations striving for domination in the cutthroat world of chemical and weapons research and development.

Install: si97a.exe [53.7MB]



Marathon Resurrection
Mac comes back

<http://resurrection.bungie.org/index.html>

Team Unpforgiven has added its own take on the weapons, beefing them up, making them look cooler and sound more dangerous. The enemies will be greasier, scarier and far more challenging opponents. The team's converting both singleplayer and multiplayer modes of Marathon, so that PC users can experience what a FPS plot should be like and Mac users can indulge themselves in nostalgia.

Install: marathonresurrectionb1_2.zip [118.2MB]



StarWars TA
I am your father, Paul

<http://www.planetannihilation.com/swta/>

Although Force Commander and Galactic Battlegrounds might be out, this mod is worth a look for Star Wars and/or RTS fans. This download is the StarterPack 1.2. It contains everything you need to get started playing SWTA. Contains all the basic structures and level 1 ground units. Visit the site for more add-on packs once you've familiarised yourself with the mod.

Install: swtapack1.zip [2.3MB]



WarHammer TA
Yowza

<http://www.planethalflife.com>

The Blister Pack is a starter pack and the first in line for the Warhammer TA mod. It only contains level 1 and some level 2 units. There's another pack on the way soon! Just unzip it to the Total Annihilation directory and double-click on WarhammerTA.exe to play.

Install: wtaBPv2.exe [3MB]

Due to technical difficulties, Hack will be unable to be published this month. We apologise for any inconvenience caused.



Actually, if truth be known, I don't know what's going on since I normally don't work here and am writting this for a friend of a guy who works in the same office as some dude who needed a hand and I just gotta get some extra cash 'cos since Uni it's been real tough finding work so, you know. What the hell is Hack anyway? This place is creepy... the guys here are weird! That's it, I'm going to the pub.



HAVE YOU DONE YOUR "CASE" STUDY?

www.lian-li.com

You may have the latest and fastest CPU and VGA card. Do you have the best case to house all the greatest components? Aluminium cases dissipate heat 3 times faster than traditional steel cases and when it's made by Lian Li, your PC experience is guaranteed luxurious. Here are some comments:

apc Australian Personal Computer

"Lian Li cases are legendary among PC enthusiasts and case-modders, and are generally considered to be the Rolls Royce of aftermarket PC cases. Not only because they are comparatively expensive, but because their features and attention to detail warrant the price."

PC PowerPlay

"A stunner. All aluminium and built to withstand a direct nuclear strike in the megaton range. As we have mentioned more than once, we even dropped this case down a flight of concrete steps and it barely flinched. Ten bays keep everything snug, three extra fans keep it cool, and slide-off covers and a motherboard tray mean it's ready for upgrade action any time."

atomic

"Undoubtedly the parent of the Aluminium case craze, Lian Li has been incredibly successful in changing the case buying mindset."

See detailed reviews (search "Lian Li") at www.dansdata.com
www.overclockers.com.au
www.gamingin3d.com

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- ◆ 2x8cm ball bearing & 2x8cm sleeve bearing case fans.
- ◆ 2 x front USB2.0 ports



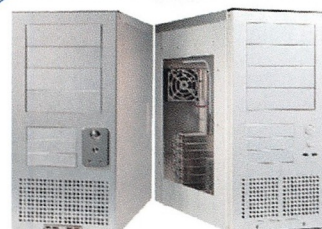
PC-6089A

Blue acrylic door **\$439.00 RRP**



PC-39A

Silver hard anodized aluminium mini case with built-in 2 mobile racks. 8 total device bays 2x5.25", 1x3.5", 3x3.5" hidden for HDD. 2 x ATA133 lockable mobile racks. 2 x 8cm sleeve bearing case fans. 2 x front USB ports **\$425.00 RRP**



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\$299.00 RRP

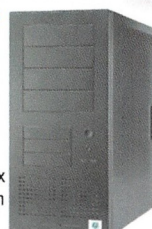


PC-65USB (Silver transparent panel)

\$369.00 RRP

Common features

- ◆ Hard anodized aluminium midi case.
- ◆ Removeable mainboard tray.
- ◆ 12 total device bays, 4 x 5.25", 3 x 3.5", 5x3.5" hidden for HDD.
- ◆ 4x8cm sleeve bearing case fans.
- ◆ 2 x front USB ports



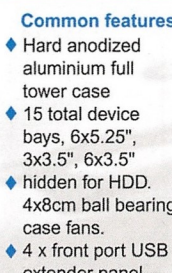
PC-61USB (Black)

\$340.00 RRP



PC-70USB (Silver)

\$499.00 RRP

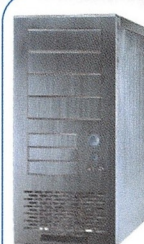


PC-71USB (Black)

\$539.00 RRP

Common features

- ◆ Hard anodized aluminium full tower case
- ◆ 15 total device bays, 6x5.25", 3x3.5", 6x3.5" hidden for HDD.
- ◆ 4x8cm ball bearing case fans.
- ◆ 4 x front port USB extender panel

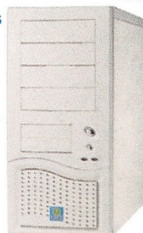


PC-7 (Black)

Full aluminium anodised black midi case **\$260.00 RRP**

Common features

- ◆ 12 total device bays, 4 x 5.25", 2 x3.5", 5x3.5" hidden for HDD.
- ◆ 3 x 8cm sleeve bearing case fans.
- ◆ 2 x front USB ports



PC-5 (Beige)

Economy beige aluminium midi case with plastic front **\$190.00 RRP**

Aluminium Desktop Cases



PC-9300

Silver hard anodized aluminium desktop case. Total 4 drive bays. 2x5.25", 2x3.5" internal bays. 2 sleeve bearing fans. Suitable for Micro ATX M/B. 2 x front USB2.0 ports. Requires micro ATX PSU **\$299.00 RRP**

PC-30

Silver mini tower full aluminium anodised. Sliding tray for ATX motherboard. 2 Fans. Total 7 bays 2x5.25", 2 x 3.5", 2 x 3.5" hidden **\$260.00 RRP**

All cases come without power supplies

Case Accessories

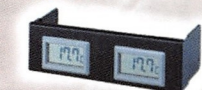


EX-10

Aluminium front panel I/O adaptor. Allow easy front access to all PC ports. **\$80.00 RRP**



PC-T4



PC-T4B

PC-T4

Silver LCD Dual Thermometer to fit 5.25" bay **\$59.00 RRP**

PC-T4B

Black LCD Dual Thermometer to fit 5.25" bay **\$59.00 RRP**

PC-T3

Silver LCD Dual Thermometer to fit 3.5" bay **\$59.00 RRP**

PC-T3B

Black LCD Dual Thermometer to fit 3.5" bay **\$59.00 RRP**

MF-20

Aluminium extension mounting kit for 2 x 3.5" Drives. Attaches under your existing HDD bay

\$16.00 RRP

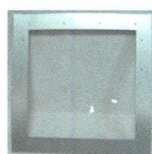
MF-30

Aluminium extension mounting kit for 3 x 3.5" Drives. Attaches under your existing HDD bay

\$19.00 RRP



MF-30



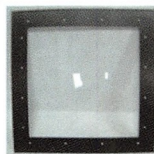
Panel-75

Panel-65

Left side window panel for PC-60USB Case **\$70.00 RRP**

Panel-75

Left side window panel for PC-70USB Case **\$105.00 RRP**



Panel-75B

Panel-65B

Black Left side window panel for PC-61USB Case **\$75.00 RRP**

Panel-75B

Black Left side window panel for PC-71USB Case **\$115.00 RRP**

EX-12

Lian-Li SCA-2 Hot Swap bay supports 3 Ultra-160 80 pin SCA drives **\$245.00 RRP**



PC-M2

Lian-Li silver hard anodized aluminium mouse mat **\$15.00 RRP**

PC-M2B

Lian-Li black hard anodized aluminium mouse mat **\$15.00 RRP**

PC-M2B

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Tropical Wings Computer North Cairns 07-4031 6883
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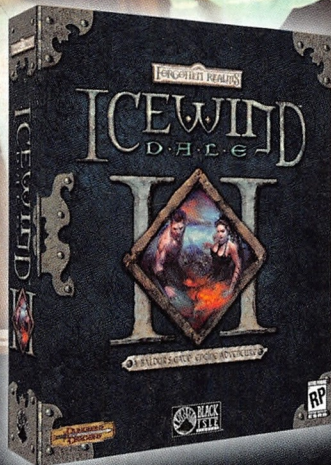
FORGOTTEN REALMS

ICEWIND DALE



"Icewind Dale II looks to be a fitting capstone to the wave of truly excellent party based role playing games."

IGN.com



BiOWARE
INFINITY ENGINE



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